

dear daughters

love letters to the
next generation

SUSIE DAVIS





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 Abingdon Press[®]
Growing in Life, Serving in Faith

NASHVILLE

DEAR DAUGHTERS
LOVE LETTERS TO THE NEXT GENERATION

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MANUFACTURED IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Dedication

To my mother.

*The kindest, gentlest woman I've
ever known, who showed me what
it means to be a loving mother.*



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Introduction

For over a decade, younger women clustered around me like hummingbirds to purple salvia. Swooping into my life for a season, gathering fuel to live a purposeful and spiritual life. I had no idea way back then why I should be graced by this charm; I only knew they peered attentively at me over my kitchen counter. They spilled open their hearts, all honest and vulnerable, while I soaped up dishes. Some sat at my dining room table eating Sunday supper with my family, tucked in beside us as our own. Others joined us on family trips.

These girls often called or texted me. Some even Skyped and FaceTimed. Over the years, we've met together in small groups for Bible study or book clubs. We've attended cooking classes together and gone on writing retreats. We've taken small-town excursions, planted flowers in my front yard, and had happy hour on my back patio. Year in and year out, no matter the season, it seemed that there was always a younger woman by my side. It was natural, organic. And they were all looking for the same thing: the nectar of age and wisdom that only



an older woman provides. Who knew nectar was sourced from a forty-something-year-old woman whose face was etched with expression lines and whose life carried a long history of learning things the hard way with God?

This mentoring of young women started when my oldest child, Will (now in his early thirties), was a senior in high school. Four of his friends asked me if I would lead them in a Bible study. They sensed the big transition from high school to college had the opportunity to knock them off balance and they wanted an “older woman” to teach them how to move gracefully from one season to the next.

The mentoring opportunity happened again when I was on a class trip abroad with my second child, Emily (now in her late twenties), during her senior year in high school. In the absence of having their own moms on the trip, Emily’s friends and peers cloistered around me when they needed a mother

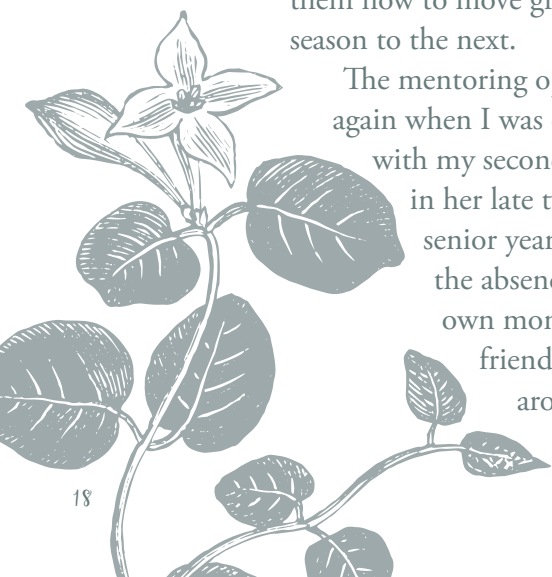


figure. It was actually on that trip that the girls started calling me Mama Suz—an endearing term they created meant to offer respect coupled with fond familiarity.

By the time my youngest child, Sara (now in her midtwenties), entered college, Mama Suz was the way all my kids introduced me to their friends. I was firmly established as a mother figure. Someone my own children would refer their friends to in seasons of confusion or grief. Someone ready to take a call, meet over coffee, or serve up a home-cooked meal.

Then the mentor opportunities started happening online. Young women I never met in person reached out to me on social media, asking for guidance and wisdom. At ministry events, girls sought me out, thanking me for encouraging them through my short open-letter posts written for my daughters on Instagram, Facebook, and my blog.

Though I didn't know it then, I was fulfilling a call on my life. Through my mothering, I was doing the good things God planned for me long ago.¹





Yep, simply by opening my heart and making room for more than just my children, I was fulfilling a great commission on my life, participating in a special ministry that God fashioned for me²—to encourage the dear daughters in my world to love God body, heart, and mind in their unique situations. To train young women to be strengthened in the inner being.³

After over a decade of being available to mother the young people in my proximity and beyond, I have discovered God's specific ministry plan for me: to boldly encourage and lead dear daughters. And this is the simple way I do it: by being a spiritual mama.

It's not complicated. It doesn't require a degree in counseling or theology. It just means I stay authentically connected to Jesus. It means I am doggedly determined to maintain and remember my identity as an "older woman." Not someone looking to be popular or hip or eternally young; rather a woman who is sober to the ways of the Spirit. Enthused and identified with

the things of God. Someone who does not let her own struggles and disappointments get in the way of her children's best interest. This is my heart for the dear daughters God brings me. As long as there are young women in need of spiritual guidance, I will be a minister of the gospel. But even more: I will be a spiritual mother.

Though I struggled when my own children left the nest, I have realized this amazing truth: a woman never need have an empty nest. And so, a mother's job is never over.

The world is full of dear daughters who need a godly woman a few steps ahead. They need someone to help them navigate life as a young woman in all the seasons of life: during college, starting a new job, marrying a man, becoming a mother.

I know this because I remember being a young woman.

I've been journaling, tracking my heart and spirit, since I was fourteen years old. Writing out my thoughts and prayers, chronicling life without realizing it. A few weeks ago, I found



a big stash of old journals and read through a few of them. Inside the pages, I could see this woman I used to be. The struggles, the joys—all things laid bare on the page. Completely naked by paper and pen. Vulnerable.

I wanted to hug her and tell her the things she prayed over so ferociously would all be okay. I wanted to hand her a cup of hot tea and tell her to settle her heart and enjoy those ridiculously simple moments being a mom. I wanted to tell her things would work out. That God was always taking care.

I would have handed her this book. I would have offered to read it with her. Because this book is a love letter about life. A reminder of God's presence and love and wonder in the middle of our everything.

There are so many dear daughters in the world who need a hand and a heart to follow. The world needs more spiritual mamas. Older, godly women who realize that mothering is a sacred trust from God. Women who gratefully acknowledge age and



Introduction

experience in order to lead a younger generation. Women who embrace the fact that mothering is a celebration of life and goodness and God.

We need to have these conversations together, one by one, and celebrate what it looks like to embrace the simplicity and beauty of being a godly woman.







Chapter One:

On Worry





Chapter One:

On Worry

Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon.

— Flannery O'Connor

God woke the sun this morning. Same as every morning. He merely whispered and the sun rose, gently pulling golden pink clouds across the pale sky. The moon quietly faded away, winking at me as she went. She'll be back later tonight in the very same spot, hovering happily against a milky black canvas spotted with stars.

I watch this transition daily from my back patio. It is such a comfort to me to see the familiar routine. Sun and moon, moon and sun. There they are in the big Texas sky, little dime-shaped discs to my eyes, moving slowly into place. The interchange is seamless, like God is playing checkers in the

dear daughters

sky, though I know the reality is more like a massive, cosmic dance. Isn't it beautiful that God is in control of the sun, the moon, and the stars? And even better, he's in control of you and me too.

I wouldn't have believed that if you told me when I was a teenager. Because something happened that was so traumatic, it robbed me of belief that God holds the world in his hands.

I was a fourteen-year-old girl sitting in my English classroom, listening as my teacher spoke, when suddenly my classmate, a neighbor boy whom I had known for years, walked in with a rifle and shot and killed my teacher. My life dramatically changed that day and my view of God along with it.

Though I heard about Jesus two years earlier at a Young Life camp and had developed a deep love for God, after the murder I started to distrust him. I felt like he must have forgotten those of us in that classroom that day: he must have been somewhere on the other side of the world, managing

something more important, like the daily interchange of the sun, moon, and stars.

In the years that followed, anxiety crept into my life, infiltrating the tiniest spaces. I worried about bad, violent things happening again, but I also worried about small things. Because after the murder, I felt God was far too busy managing bigger things to keep thoughtful watch over me. So I started taking care of myself, doing anything and everything to keep bad things from happening by my own power.

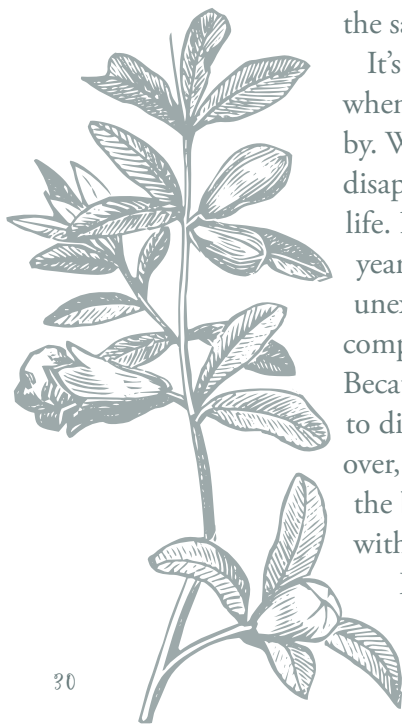
White-knuckling my life that way soon developed into a joy-crushing stronghold of fear. Because even as I frantically tried to keep my life stable and beautiful, I knew that I was powerless to stop unexpected things from surprising and astounding and saddening me once again.

I know you, too, have experienced things that make you feel anxious. It doesn't have to be something as shocking as a murder: It's not just the big things that take us by surprise.

It's the small and middle-sized things too. The job loss, the totaled car, or the misunderstanding between you and your friend. Maybe it's the inability to get pregnant, the wrecked relationship with your dad, or the ongoing tension between you and your mom. Things no one else would label as catastrophic, but things that break your heart apart bit by bit just the same.

It's easy to move into autopilot when hard things happen. We get by. We cope. We push past the disappointments and keep living life. But then days, months, or even years later, we're trying to deal with unexplained and ongoing tension, completely unaware of its origin. Because we've become accustomed to dismissing the heartache over and over, rather than honestly looking at the bigger issue of disappointment with God.

For example, I recently got a letter from a dear daughter. And I want to share a little bit of it,



because it's a small peek into an honest heart dealing with the same minor catastrophes we all face. She wrote:

I read your post (on social media) about loving God but not trusting him. I grew up in a Christian home and my parents were divorced when I was twelve years old. I love God but don't trust him with my heart. As I see friend after friend get divorced, I wonder if I'm next. I'm full of anxiety and fear and have been for years, and it won't go away. It's taking over my life. I don't know what to do. How did you stop worrying?

I love how she gets right to it. First, she identifies her heartbreak: the divorce of her parents when she was twelve years old. Second, she identifies the coping technique: fear. And then she throws out the question: How did you stop worrying?

I stopped worrying because my worry broke me down. I was a young

If you are bound up in anxiety, you'll miss the daily wonder. How God has filled the world to the brim with curious beauty. How he whispers to the sun and it rises. Let him whisper to you too.

mom with a baby boy who literally felt like everything was on her shoulders. I constantly thought about the next awful thing that might happen if I wasn't hyperalert and always on guard. I felt wholly responsible for everything in his life, even the things I couldn't control. It was exhausting. Our small shoulders are not meant to carry that kind of pressure. So I cratered and God caught me.

I don't want you to have to go through a breakdown, though if you do, God does have a way of coming through most miraculously and magnificently. But what if you pretend I'm sitting right there with you and we poke around a little about when all the worrying started for you?

What was it in your life that prompted the anxious thoughts? Sit for a minute and ask God to help you remember. And then honest as you're able, think on how you might be using coping techniques to handle some heartbreak between you and God.

Thinking things are one way and

dear daughters

seeing how quickly things change can make us want to take a stranglehold on life. But no matter how tightly we hold on, it doesn't mean we can control outcomes.

When I think back on witnessing the murder now, I realize the hardest thing to get over was this idea that God wasn't as big and trustworthy and helpful as I originally thought. And that maybe he didn't love me enough to step in and intervene. That's when I decided to micromanage my life as a coping technique.

What about you? How has your heart been broken? How did you take over?

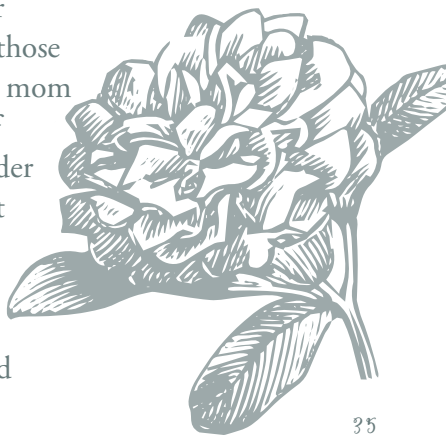
So many dear daughters I talk with diminish their pain by either trying not to think about the original issues or by sweeping them away. What if instead you looked with compassion and curiosity about the source of the problem and heartbreak it created?

When you speak up about the problem and identify the unsuccessful ways you're addressing them, that's

when you can really get help. What is your honest feeling toward God? Do you really trust him? Or has there been something that causes you to withhold yourself from him? Is there something that creates an uneasiness and pushes you toward managing things on your own?

The problem with all the worry is that it blinds you of the wonder. The wonder you experience when you lie on your back and watch white clouds float by against the blue sky. The wonder of the how it feels to stand outside in the cool grass and sip in the summer air without those nagging thoughts filling up your head. I think now that some of those early first moments being a new mom were wrecked because instead of marveling at the bundle of wonder before me, I was worrying about what to do next.

Annie Dillard writes, “Every day has its own particular brand of holiness to discover and worship appropriately.”



dear daughters

I agree.

I know this from experience: if you are bound up in anxiety, you'll miss the daily wonder. How God has filled the world to the brim with curious beauty. How he whispers to the sun and it rises. Let him whisper to you too.

I want you to be open to your one beautiful life. Because you and I only get one, right? So we walk forward into the unexpected, pain and all. We walk forward in faith, though at times limping, knowing that God is still there for us.

We take tiny, brave steps forward today. No thinking about tomorrow's problems or next week's issues. Just for today, think only on today.

Maybe your one brave step today means today you make an appointment to meet with a counselor. Or today, you set aside something that you can't control, that you have obsessed over fixing. Or today, you take a break from watching all the horrifying negative news that's freaking

you out and helping absolutely no one.

How will you practice peace today?
Just today. Not tomorrow or next
week. Speak it out, write it out, get it
out.

You know the very good news? As
you practice that one thing, for just
today, you are actively loving and
trusting God. And all we can really
ever do is love God today. In this one
moment, loving and trusting, pushing
aside fear and worry.

Just as the sun and moon surrender
daily to God's hand, I'm praying you
find that small space to surrender your
heart to God.