



a confident mom

Simple Ways to Give Your Child
What They Need Most

Renee Swope

Bestselling Author of *A Confident Heart*, with over 150,000 Sold

“As a mom, I must have asked over a thousand times, ‘Do I really have what it takes to raise my kids the right way?’ And when I wasn’t asking that, I was praying, ‘Lord, help me!’ That’s why I’m so thrilled my dear friend Renee Swope has poured her godly and well-earned mothering wisdom into this beautiful book. It will help moms release the anxiety and shame that often weigh overwhelmed parents down. And even better, this message will build them up with the kind of hope and encouragement moms desperately need. The truths and help within the pages of *A Confident Mom* are timeless. Be sure to get your copy and let it transform your mom life today!”

Lysa TerKeurst, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author
and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

“Renee’s words are a guiding light wherever you are in motherhood. Whether you’re just starting your journey to motherhood or are several years in, *A Confident Mom* is filled with wisdom, encouragement, and practical ideas that will meet you right where you are and lift you up with everything you didn’t even know you needed! Renee’s voice is one you can trust, coming from a heart that has lived and is still living the truths written on each page.”

Jordan Lee Dooley, national bestselling author
of *Own Your Everyday* and founder of Soul Scripts

“This book! Can you hear the cheering outside of your window? That would be me—and every woman reading these pages! Practical and poignant, *A Confident Mom* is the book we’ve all been craving. Get ready to take a deep breath of relief as you devour Renee’s words—relief that motherhood doesn’t have to be perfect to be meaningful and relief that God’s grace is a very real thing. From this book’s application of biblical truth for all of our needs to its tactical solutions for changing our actions and attitudes, I cannot wait to read it again and again!”

Lara Casey, mom of three, author of *Cultivate* and *Make It Happen*, and founder and CEO of Cultivate What Matters

“*A Confident Mom* is exactly the book every young mama needs to read. Every page brims with wisdom, honesty, and heartfelt encouragement from Renee as she shares her own story of motherhood’s struggles, triumphs, and joys—all while looking to Jesus. Renee writes as a mentor and friend on what it looks like to develop the Lord’s character within our children while at the same time God is developing His heart within us as we look to Him. I

Renee Swope, *A Confident Mom*

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am so thankful Renee took the time to write *A Confident Mom* and share it with such wisdom and tenderness. This is a must-read I will reference throughout my boy's growing up years!"

Gretchen Saffles, author of *The Well-Watered Woman* and the *Give Me Jesus* journal and founder of Well-Watered Women

"This book is a must-read for any mom whose thoughts move faster than her feet as she worries and wonders if she's doing enough and is enough for her kids. Renee speaks beautifully and powerfully to moms about God's unfolding grace and unfailing love, offering wisdom and simple ways to give your children what they need most! Within each truth-filled page of *A Confident Mom*, you'll find a friend who offers encouragement and practical tools to help you dissipate your doubts and gain unwavering confidence, knowing you are valued, more than enough, and so very loved as a mom and as a child of God."

Cindy Bultema, executive director of GEMS Girls' Clubs, speaker, and author of *Live Full Walk Free: Set Apart in a Sin-Soaked World* and *Red Hot Faith*

"Like a hand reaching out with hope and help, Renee's personal stories, confessions, revelations, and everyday life illustrations are for moms of every age and stage who long to lead and love their children with confidence. As I read her words, it felt like Renee was sitting with me, encouraging me like she has so many times before. I'm so excited for *A Confident Mom* to go out into the world to impact the lives of so many mamas who are desperate to hear truth and receive grace! This book will leave you inspired with simple and practical ideas and exhaling with sighs of relief while smiling as you discover grace and the God who gives and gifts it so freely."

Rachel Kang, author and founder of Indelible Ink Writers

"If you ever struggle with feelings of inadequacy and overwhelming responsibility as a parent, then *A Confident Mom* is just what you need! Renee throws a life preserver of hope to every mom who wants to parent well but doesn't have the tools to do so. Filled with timeless biblical truths, perspective-changing encouragement, and practical ideas for everyday parenting, this book will equip you to love your family in a way that honors God and nurtures relationships for the long haul!"

Krista Gilbert, home coach, author of *Reclaiming Home*, and cohost of *The Open Door Sisterhood* podcast

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What They Need Most



Renee Swope


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To Joshua and Andrew
Brandi and Hannah Rose

These pages hold some of the most
important parts of our family's story
and the legacy of our faith.
Thank you for your overwhelming support
and enthusiasm when I asked you guys
if I should write this book, and
the way you encouraged and prayed
for me while I did!

I dedicate this book to you and your children,
and your children's children.
Now that it's written, may I have
some grandbabies, please?

*Let this be written for a future generation,
that a people not yet created may praise the LORD.*

PSALM 102:18



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Part  One

It Starts in
Your Heart

one

The Day I Almost Quit



Before we get started, I think you need to know something. I really love my kids, but I have not always loved or even *liked* being a mom. When my baby boys turned into toddlers who wouldn't listen, I panicked inside. All my mom-friends looked like they knew what they were doing. Secretly, I wondered, *What is wrong with me? Why can't I figure out how to be a good mom?*

I was young, and my expectations were high. And I had a bad habit of comparing how I felt like a failure inside with other moms who looked like they had it all together on the outside. Whether I was at the park or the store, at church or a birthday party, it seemed like all the other moms knew what they were doing. Their children listened to them, and some moms even dressed their kids in matching outfits. I wondered how in the world they pulled it off. I could barely get a shower, get my kids dressed, and get us out of the house before lunch. It was easy to assume these other moms were killing it at motherhood, when in reality they were probably struggling and doubting themselves just like I was.

One afternoon, I filled my journal with scribbled words, guilt-ridden thoughts, tears, and desperate prayers. It had been a hard day, running too many errands with two small children. My to-do list included the dry cleaner, the pharmacy, the grocery store, and Target. By the time we got to our last stop, my boys were ready to climb monkey bars on a playground.

My two-year-old was fussy and tired. My four-year-old was being difficult. No matter how many times I told him, “I am not buying you any toys,” he wouldn’t stop asking. When I threatened him with consequences, he smiled and walked quietly beside me—for about sixty seconds. Then he started climbing in and out of the shopping cart to entertain himself and to annoy his little brother.

The last thing I needed was a store clerk to come around the corner and reprimand me for letting my kid break the safety rules. *Forget it!* I thought. Making a U-turn in the aisle, I headed to the checkout and wondered if maybe the cashier knew at what age kids learned to be content. *Maybe she’ll tell me this is just a stage and he’ll grow out of it,* I thought.

The checkout line led to more begging for pocket-sized toys and candy bars strategically placed at eye-level for small children. Could it get any worse? I opted out of asking the cashier for parenting advice, unloaded my stuff onto the checkout conveyor belt as fast as I could, and left the store as quickly as possible.

On the drive home, I made sure Joshua knew just how frustrated I was with him. I told him that because he wouldn’t listen, both he and Andrew were going to eat lunch and take an early nap when we got home. No playtime. No snuggles. No stories. No songs. I was done!

After the boys ate lunch and went down for their naps, I started thinking how I could convince my husband to fire me. It wasn’t that I wanted to actually quit being a mom (although I’m sure I felt that way some days). I just wanted to quit doing the hard parts of parenting while working part-time and staying home with our boys.

I thought if I could go back to working full-time, at least I would be with people who appreciated my efforts and listened to me (most of the time). And maybe someone else could teach my kids how to be kind, patient, obedient, and content.

I had a feeling my husband wouldn't agree to firing me, so I decided to look for some pink construction paper and write "I QUIT!" on it. That way I could turn in my pink slip when he got home. Unfortunately, all of our pink construction paper was gone. It was definitely not turning out to be my best day.

Normally, I would make a cup of coffee, start a load of laundry, and enjoy some quiet while the boys napped, but not that day. I decided I needed to do something that would make me feel competent and like I'd accomplished something that day.

Reaching into my work bag, I pulled out an article my friend Lysa had asked me to edit. I shook my head and sighed as I read the title: "Bringing Out the Winner in Your Child." It seemed like I couldn't avoid the topic, no matter how hard I tried.

A few paragraphs into Lysa's article, she referenced *Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World*, where author Zig Ziglar shares a story about Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was the wealthiest man in America in the early 1900s, and at one point he was so successful he employed more than forty-three millionaires, which was unheard of at the time. Intrigued by his wealth, a reporter asked Carnegie how he had hired forty-three millionaires. Andrew Carnegie explained that

the men were not millionaires when they started working for him but had become millionaires as a result. The reporter then asked, "How did you develop these men to become so valuable to you that you have paid them this much money?"

"Men are developed the same way gold is mined," Carnegie explained. "When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold, but one doesn't go into the mine looking for dirt, one goes in looking for gold, and the more he looks for the more he finds."¹

Ziglar used this story to encourage parents to “look for the gold in their children instead of focusing on their faults.”² Gold? What gold? I didn’t see any. Not even a speck. All I saw was the dirt of my child’s disobedience and discontent along with my defeated mindset and critical attitude.

I felt like such a failure. And I was sure God was just as disappointed in me as I was in myself. The critical words I said to Joshua on the way home replayed in my head. I cringed as I thought about the harsh tone of my voice as I intentionally tried to make my son feel guilty for his behavior. It wasn’t my best parenting moment for sure.

I didn’t feel like editing anymore, so I put my work down and pulled out my journal. Filling blank pages with scribbled thoughts, I wrote,

I hate who I have become. I’m such a horrible mom. Why didn’t someone tell me how hard this was going to be? I’m frustrated with my kids and myself. I have no patience and I don’t know what I am doing! I feel guilty all the time. I couldn’t wait to be a mom and now I want to quit. I wish I had a gold miner in my life who could see something good in me.³

This was not the first time I felt like a failure as a mom, and I knew it wouldn’t be the last. I wished there was someone I could talk to. Sadly, I was too ashamed to tell any of my friends how much I was struggling because I was afraid they might judge me.

AS YOU HOLD THIS BOOK IN YOUR HANDS, I wonder how many really hard days you’ve had as a mom. Maybe you’ve compared yourself to other moms and felt like a failure too. Or you’ve had expectations of yourself and your kids that have created a world of disappointment. I wonder if you feel alone in your doubts and discouragement, like I did. Maybe you don’t think you have what

it takes to be a good mom, and you're afraid your inadequacies and failures will cause your kids to need a therapist or stop them from following God. I know just how you feel, and so does almost every other mom.

What you need is someone to help you process your thoughts and buried hopes, your doubts and high expectations. Someone who will show you how to depend on God's Word as your foundation and His love as your guide. Someone who will help you discover simple ways to give your children what they need most while letting God give you what your heart needs most from Him.

You see, when I set out to accomplish something that afternoon, I had no idea what God was about to accomplish in me as He began to change my perspective as a mom and encourage my heart as a child of God.

As the Lord helped me grasp how He parented me, it changed the way I parented my children. In the days and years that followed, God shifted my focus away from correcting my kids' habits to connecting with their hearts. Instead of me always noticing their shortcomings, He showed me how to notice and nurture their character. Over the past twenty years God has helped me understand His grace through relationship-driven parenting while releasing me from the burden of performance-based living.

Those little boys who were two and four are now twenty-three and twenty-six, and both are married.

We also have a twelve-year-old daughter, Aster, who our family adopted from Ethiopia when she was ten months old. I've gone

I had no idea what
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as a child of God.

before you, and I'm still right there with you in the trenches of motherhood, leaning on God's grace and everything He taught me the day I almost quit and in the years that followed.

Everything
I needed to
know as a mom,
I would learn as
a child of God.

This is the story of His unfolding grace and unfailing love that helped me see that everything I needed to know as a mom, I would learn as a child of God.

If you long for encouragement and hope, along with practical tools and biblical truths to help you become a confident mom, I'd love to be that someone for you I wish I'd had so many years ago.

Lord, thank You for seeing me and knowing what I need. Thank You for coming to my rescue on the days when my mom-doubts and discouragement make me question if I'm doing anything right. I need Your perspective and encouragement. I need Your help to process my thoughts and hopes, my doubts and dreams, my desires and expectations. Show me simple ways to give my children what they need most while making space and time for You to give me what my heart needs most from You. Amen.

Two

Finding a New Place to Start



As I poured out my heart in my journal that day, I wrote down everything I was thinking. It was painful to read my own words, but it was important for me to see what was going on in my heart.

And just as I finished writing “I couldn’t wait to be a mom and now I want to quit. I wish I had a gold miner in my life who could see something good in me,” I sensed God whispering to my heart, *Renee, I am that gold miner. You are the one who is so critical of yourself. You are the one who focuses on your mistakes and beats yourself up with accusation and condemnation. Those are not My thoughts. I see the gold of My image, woven into your heart when I created you. And I want to bring it to the surface so your kids can see it too.*

Have you ever sensed God whispering something to your heart or leading your thoughts in a direction that is not normal for you? His voice is not audible to your ears but is clear inside your mind,

like the words are rising up from inside you. That's what was happening to me. The possibility that God wasn't focused on my faults gave me a sense of hope, but I questioned if it was just my thoughts or really His Spirit encouraging me. I couldn't imagine how God saw anything good in me that day.

I decided to take what I sensed God was saying and compare it to Scripture to see if it was consistent with His Word and His character. I remembered times in Scripture when God didn't let someone's failure or inadequacy define them or hold them back from being used by Him. Times when Jesus extended grace and mercy to people who were a mess, just like me.

As those stories came to mind, I opened the pages of my Bible to find them. First, I turned to Judges 6 to read about Gideon, a man who hid from his enemies in a winepress—until God called him a mighty warrior and helped him become one. God told Gideon to go in the strength he had and not focus on what he didn't have. Just like Andrew Carnegie developed those men to reach their fullest potential, God saw beyond who Gideon was to who he could become.

I also thought about Moses, a man who struggled with self-doubt and insecurity. His story begins in the book of Exodus. When God called Moses to be His mouthpiece and lead His people out of Egypt, Moses listed all the reasons he was not a good choice. But God didn't give up on him. With His presence and help, Moses became what God called and created him to be. Did he do it perfectly? Nope. But God didn't focus on Moses's faults or failures. He focused on Moses's desire to be faithful and his willingness to trust God with his whole heart.

With each story I read, I sensed God confirming He saw beyond who I was to who I could become. The day I wanted to quit was the day I started to realize how destructive my critical thoughts were and how much I had allowed self-doubt, inadequacy, shame, and guilt to define me. And all of it was destroying my confidence and joy as a mom.

But God was there with me that day—in the store, at the cash register, in the car on the way home, at the table as I rushed the boys through lunch and hurried them to their beds. He saw my heart unraveling in frustration and defeat. And He was there waiting for me to sit down so He could show me I didn't have to stay in this hard place. I didn't need to quit; I just needed a new place to start.

I didn't need to quit;
I just needed a new
place to start.

Deconstructing the Lies of Performance-Based Living

Although I loved the concept of becoming like a gold miner, I knew it would be hard for me to see the good in my children if all I saw were flaws in myself. So, I decided to pursue an understanding of both. I asked God to show me what the gold would look like in my kids and what was going on inside of me. Why did I feel driven to get so much done that day and every other day? And why was I constantly berating myself with criticism and comparison?

His answers didn't come in a day or even in a week. They came over time as I journaled and prayed, read through the Psalms and the Gospels, and listened to worship songs. I remember praying Psalm 25:4–5, “Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” And He did.

One day, while I was journaling, I had a flashback from college. In it, I was sitting on the floor in my apartment talking on the phone with my mom, who was three hours away. With tears pouring down my cheeks, I choked out the most vulnerable questions I had ever asked: “Mom, will you still love me if I never accomplish anything ever again? If I don't make the dean's list, or graduate with honors, or get a great job offer, or finish college . . . will you still love me?” I was in the middle of an emotional

breakdown and everything I had been thinking and feeling for years just came pouring out.

When that memory came out of nowhere, I sensed God was showing me how things from my childhood had impacted my perspective and approach to motherhood, and that looking back would help me move forward.

Growing up, I remember longing for more of my mom's time and attention. My parents were divorced, and my two brothers and I lived with our mom, who worked long hours, late nights, and many weekends. When she wasn't at work, she was busy doing other things or having a drink with friends. I didn't realize it, but I must have believed her lack of availability meant I wasn't worth her time. Like a little sponge, I soaked up the details of how Mom spent her money, her time, and her attention, believing if I pursued the things she valued, she would value me.

From middle school through college, I worked multiple jobs and participated in more extracurricular activities than should have been allowed. If I was earning money and doing something significant, it felt like I mattered.

I also felt like I was running a race that didn't have a finish line, always trying to catch my breath but afraid to slow down. When I was sixteen, I started struggling with anxiety and depression. Instead of cutting back, I kept pushing myself. And my mom encouraged it because she thought being busy would distract me or make me happy, because she didn't know any better. By my junior year in college, I had almost everything I wanted, yet I felt like I had nothing.

Depleted, hopeless, and chronically fatigued, I couldn't keep going. All my doing came to a screeching halt. My capacity collapsed. Sadly, when I could no longer be productive as a high achiever, I felt worthless and unworthy of love. And I think that's why I asked Mom if she would still love me if I never accomplished another thing. "Of course I will still love you, Renee," she assured me, and begged me to come home.

Our Worth Is Not Determined by Our Work

When we believe our worth is determined by our work, whether in an office or at home, volunteer or paid, the thought of slowing down is terrifying. Some of us grew up in families or churches that influenced our beliefs about our worth. But these aren't the only influences. We live in a culture filled with messaging that tells us our productivity proves our worth. And it is a lie from the pit of hell that is wreaking havoc on our mental health, our physical and spiritual well-being, our youth, and our families. We have got to recognize this underlying belief that has too much power and influence over our decisions and in the direction of our lives.

If we are going to become confident moms in Christ and live in the fullness of God's will for us and our families, we have got to take hold of our thoughts and our time. And we have to give God full access to rewire both around this truth: our value has been predetermined by the One who made us, and it is firmly established in the unshakable power and permanence of God's unconditional love.

This is the truth that rescued me from my downward spiral, a few weeks after my breakdown, when I'd returned to finish classes and decided to visit a church near my college campus. They "happened" to be doing a sermon series about God's unconditional love. Honestly, I didn't know unconditional

love was even possible. I had never seen those two words next to each other in a sentence. But through those messages, God answered so many of my questions and set me on a journey of seeking and finding the love I had been looking for.

Our value has been predetermined by the One who made us, and it is firmly established in the unshakable power and permanence of God's unconditional love.

When I became a mom, I unknowingly fell back into my old thought patterns of performance-based living. And here I was, married and a mama of two, remembering how much I had forgotten. Like the first time God told me He loved me while I was reading one of my favorite books, *Longing for Love*. In it, the author referenced Isaiah 43, so I opened my Bible and read, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. . . . Because *you are precious in my eyes*, and honored, and *I love you*” (vv. 1, 4 ESV, emphasis added).

It says I love you, I thought to myself. God actually says I love you.

Do you need to hear those words of assurance like I did thirty years ago and every day that followed? I especially needed to hear them the day I found myself running again. Running myself ragged as I ran too many errands with my two little boys.

God wants to say those words to you today. *I love you. You don't have to “do” anything to make Me love you more. You are Mine. And you are enough, just as you are.*

Lord, I need a new place to start, a place where I can slow down long enough to let You love me. A place where I can be reminded that my worth is not based on my work. Your unconditional love bestows value on me that I could never earn. Thank You for loving me and for seeing beyond my flaws and failures. Help me start over by remembering who I am as Your child so I can become who You created me to be as a mom. Amen.