



Candyce Carden

is a writer and teacher in Georgia. She's worked with students from kindergarten through college and directed the preschool learning program for her church.

Her favorite role, however, is mother and grandmother.

Learning to Trust God in Difficult Times

"I don't know how you do it," folks often said with a shake of their head. They were referring to my son's deployment to Fallujah with the USMC during the height of the Iraq War. The days were easier because I was busy teaching school. I talked and laughed with friends and students, and life felt normal. But the nights were tough.

I fell asleep right away but was usually jolted awake in the dead of the night. With all facades cast aside and nothing to distract me, reality set in. My heart raced, and I gasped for air as stress hormones held my brain hostage. I fought these panic attacks on my own for a while and lost so much sleep it became hard to function even during the day.

I needed a better counterattack if I was going to get through these miserable nights when Satan fueled my thoughts with anxiety.

One night I stopped tossing and turning and opened my Bible. The smell and feel of it had an immediate calming effect. I read random verses. I read familiar verses. I read and searched until I found a beautiful verse in Zephaniah 3:17 that seemed meant for me. The next time I struggled with sleep, I prayed my version of the verse over and over:

"Lord, quiet me with your love; sing songs of joy over me while I sleep."

And more times than not, calmness covered me like a security blanket, and I'd find sleep again.

There were a few rough days as well. Before my students entered the classroom one day, I checked the news on my computer's homepage.

Insurgent Homemade Bomb Kills 10 Marines and Injures 11 In Fallujah

Reading quickly, I realized this happened to a unit attached to my son's company. The group, taken off base to an abandoned flour factory for a promotion ceremony, never got to celebrate. The area had been swept for explosives and deemed safe; nevertheless, one of the Marines stepped on the pressure plate of a hidden bomb and set off an explosion.

Bile rose in my throat. My breathing was shallow and my heart beat faster as I scanned the page, searching for identities of the dead and wounded. My rational self said, "Whoa, slow down — you'd already know."

My son was safe, but that didn't stop my sorrow for the families of the ones who were not.

And then there was the morning I saw two uniformed military officers in the hallway as I unlocked my classroom. Were they here to see me? My chest

tightened, and I was unable to breathe as I closed my door to hide from them. Leaning against the concrete-block wall for support, I pleaded, "No, God, no. Please, no."

Thankfully, the officers were at school as guest speakers for a class of fifth graders.

God placed many people in my husband's and my life to support us during this time. Their prayers and phone calls were great comforts. The care packages they kept flowing to my boy lifted my heart. But an incident experienced by another mother and her son taught me mothers have to let go and trust God no matter where our children are.

My sister's son was a few years older than mine. To help pay college costs, he worked as a manager trainee at a popular restaurant near campus. One night he was tasked with tallying the day's receipts after the restaurant closed. He and another manager finished the job, locked the proceeds in the safe, and stepped out into the cool early-morning air. Two masked men greeted them with guns.

One of the men accompanied my nephew to the office, pointed a gun at him, and ordered him to open the safe. The other thief held the coworker outside. Not knowing the combination of the lock, my nephew desperately looked around the office for an answer. A crowbar lay in the corner of the room that he'd never noticed before. For what seemed an eternity, he worked the crowbar until he was able to force the safe open. The man called in his accomplice, cleared out the safe, and locked the frightened young men in a storage room. After waiting a half hour and hearing nothing more, the boys called the police on one of their cell phones.

After learning of my nephew's harrowing event and the aftermath of his PTSD, I had a revelation. Our children don't have to be 7,000 miles from home fighting a war on terrorism to meet danger. No matter how near our children are, disaster can strike. Paradoxically, this recognition helped me let go of the fear that had gripped me during my son's deployment. Having my boy home wouldn't ensure his safety. I had to let go and trust God.

Father,

Thank you for using the gift of parenthood to mature my faith. The direction of our children's lives is no more controllable than the direction of our own. Only you know the future. Help me let go of my worry, my anxiety, my need to control. Cover him with your feathers; give him refuge under your wings." Amen. †

If you have a turning point in your life you would like to share, email your story to editor@todayschristianliving.org. All submissions must be under 800 words. If we print your story, we will pay you \$75. We reserve the right to edit for length and content.

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