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You Have a Decision to Make

Two photos are forever cemented into my mind.

The first one is a precious image of a girl I know kneeling with her mom, who is my friend, to surrender her life to Christ. In this photo, the girl—whose name I simply cannot get myself to fictionalize—has a smile so big it’s contagious.

The other photo is horrific. It is of the same girl. Let me tell you a little more about my friend and her daughter, before I tell you what the image looks like.

When she was eleven, she began to pressure her parents for permission to have an Instagram account. But they maintained that the app’s minimum recommended age¹ should be respected. They stood firm and told her “not yet.” When their daughter had a strong emotional reaction to their decision, they thought it was just “normal” tween-girl drama.

After all, even after her request, she continued to be involved in and succeed in a lot of extracurricular activities, remained a helpful big sister, and still melted hearts when she sang. She seemed to have accepted their “not yet.”

Nothing could have prepared them for the phone call they got some months later from a neighbor, to warn them of their daughter’s secret. She had gone behind her parents’ backs to open an Instagram account.

But that wasn’t the worst of it.

Her most recent post was a chilling photo I wish I had never seen. This precious girl, not yet twelve years old, had cuts in her wrist and blood was running down her arm as she stared blankly into the camera.

My friend had a decision to make: how would she use this painful opportunity to nurture her daughter in Truth?



I'm guessing you picked up this book for the same reason I wrote it. You see that our girls are in trouble, and you want to do something about it.

Most of today's tween girls suffer on what is called a spectrum of angst. It's not a matter of *if* they will struggle—with depression, anxiety, fear, loneliness, and anger—but *how much*. Sociologist Juliet Schor, who studies trends in family and women's issues, warns that the emotional problems manifesting in our daughters that may seem normal to us were cause for aggressive treatment not so many years ago.

Today's average (i.e., normal) young person between the ages of nine and seventeen scores as high on anxiety scales as children who were admitted to clinics for psychiatric disorders in 1957.²

In an effort to keep their daughters from being a statistic, many moms are leaning on bestselling books, counseling, mommy blogs, and popular speakers to help them. There's often nothing wrong with these resources. In fact, I've used all of them to help me become a healthier woman and to raise whole children. They offer us understanding and good ideas, but on their own, they do not get to the heart of solving the brokenness in our families.

Friend, we need more than just talking about the ruin that is occurring in tween girls. We need a solution. We need to understand *WHY* they are struggling and *HOW* to stop it.

WHY GIRLS ARE STRUGGLING

As your daughter is learning in chapter 1 of *Lies Girls Believe*, all of our troubles go back to the Garden of Eden where Satan, disguised as a snake, told the very first lie to the very first woman. From that encounter until now, he has used deception to win our affections, influence our choices, and ultimately destroy our lives. ▼



TRUTH NUGGET: “The devil . . . was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)

Lying has always been Satan's game plan.

But here's the thing: We play the game with him. Eve wasn't a completely innocent bystander. She cooperated with the snake.

How did Eve go from having a perfect day in Paradise to the most cataclysmic day in all of human history? She listened to the snake's lie, and then she began to dwell on it. She mulled it over and got emotional, which is what led to her downfall. When obsessive thoughts and emotions take over, we are in deep trouble. I wrote it like this for your daughter:



Maybe she **FELT** confused.

“Wait . . . did Adam misunderstand what God told him?!”

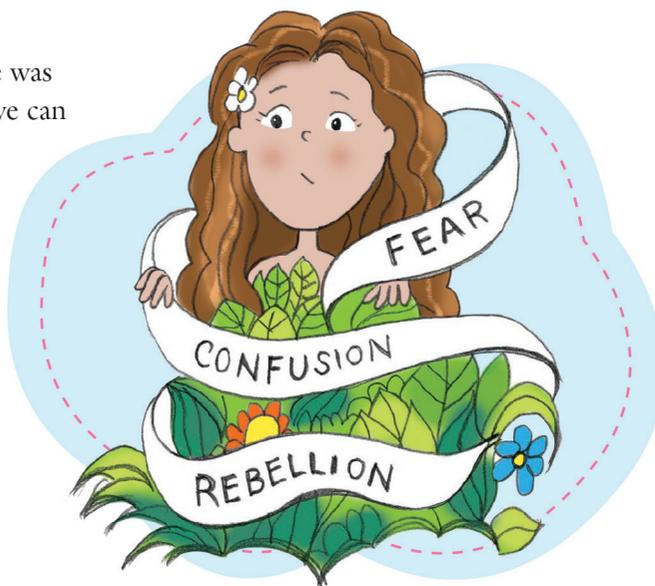
Or maybe she **FELT** rebellious.

“If that’s how God is going to be, I don’t *want* to follow God’s rules!”

Or maybe she **FELT** afraid.

“Oh no! What if God isn’t as good as we think He is?”

We don’t know what Eve was thinking or feeling, but we can see that she allowed her feelings to be in control. That’s when something really bad happened: **Eve began to believe the lie.** She questioned God’s Truth!



THE WOMAN BELIEVED THE LIE

Believing the lie led to eating the fruit God told her and Adam not to eat. The consequences of that sin have known no end. Here are some of the alarming ways they are manifesting as risks to our daughters today:

- 🍏 *Adolescent depression rates are on the rise, with tween girls especially at risk.³*
- 🍏 *An increase in reported anxiety, sleeplessness, loneliness, worry, and dependence coincides with the release of the first smartphone.⁴ 23.5 million users of Snapchat are under the age of eleven.⁵*

🍏 Rates of ER visits for treatment of cutting, burning, and ingesting poison has surged almost 19 percent between 2009 and 2015 for girls aged ten to fourteen.⁶

🍏 The average age of onset for anorexia has dropped from thirteen to seventeen down to nine to twelve, with children as young as seven being diagnosed. Sixty percent of elementary and middle school teachers witness eating disorders in their schools.⁷

While many girls won't show up in the scary stats above, most will struggle with body image issues, mean-girl moments, boy craziness, materialism, academic pressure, and a host of other more common problems.

We've got to do something.

HOW TO HELP THEM

There is something more powerful than Satan's lies—
and that is God's Truth.

For over two decades, I have been guiding teens and adult women through recovery of all kinds of emotional trauma, addictions, and sinful patterns. I have helped them realize what lies they have believed and how to experience dramatic Truth encounters with God's Spirit. It is always breathtaking to see Him at work.

This process works for younger girls too. And it's time to begin to use it. The lies girls believe must be uprooted and replaced with God's Truth. This is the skill I want to help your daughter learn in the pages of *Lies Girls Believe*.

I'm not talking about a mystical formula that will make all her tween drama disappear. There won't be any shortcuts past mean girls, school stress, or family pain. Life is hard. But together, you and I can equip your daughter to walk through the realities of life—academic stress, peer pressure, social media angst, getting cut from a team, and even family brokenness—in freedom and true joy.

But, before we get to the Truth your daughter needs, do you mind if we talk about some Truth that you and I need?

Let's lean into Genesis 3—the same passage your daughter is studying in *Lies Girls Believe*—to conform our hearts to Truth. After all, just because we are moms does not mean we don't have any sticky feelings, or that we have become immune to lies.

**IN THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF THIS BOOK, I'D LIKE TO UNPACK
THREE OF THE BIGGEST LIES MOMS BELIEVE. LET'S DIVE INTO THE FIRST.**

It's one that I know very well.

There were times of mothering my tween girls when I *felt* a deep sense of impotence, almost as if I was comatose and could not imagine what to say or do. For example, when they faced friend-

ship drama, I sometimes felt clueless about how to sort it out. Or when they wanted to buy that cute but short pair of cut-offs, I struggled with how to say “no,” without sounding self-righteous or implying that this was a measurement of their spirituality or mine. The confusion overwhelmed me. I sometimes felt like there was no way to control what my daughters believed.

Then, there were those euphoric times when I *felt* like I deserved the “Christian Mother of the Year” award. I felt superior to other mothers and believed I was in control of my daughters’ beliefs. Don’t judge! You know you’ve been there too.

Note the emphasis on my feelings. Just like Eve—and our daughters—you and I are prone to allow our feelings to control us. The emotions I had concerning my daughters’ developing belief systems and my parenting skills were evidence that I was struggling with a common mom lie.

► MOM LIE #1: ◀

“I CAN’T/CAN CONTROL WHAT MY DAUGHTER BELIEVES.”

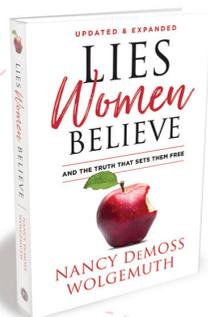
This lie—actually two variations of the same lie—is powerful and preeminent, which is why you’ll also find it addressed in *Lies Women Believe*. The first version of it tells us that we have no control. The second tells us that we have supreme control.

The Enemy uses these two polar opposites to place us in bondage as moms. One causes complacency because we are fearful that our intervention wouldn’t help anyway. The other causes pride that we have everything under control, causing us to miss important cues when our daughters are in trouble.

I had one particularly perplexing encounter with a mother who never made it to one of my focus groups. She’s an articulate, intelligent woman whose opinions I was excited to hear for my research. When I saw her at a public event, I told her as much. She kindly explained that she would not be attending my focus group. I asked her why. She said, “*My daughter is home-schooled. I monitor the influences in her life, so she doesn’t believe any lies.*”

I stared blankly at her, unsure of what to say. Positive I had misunderstood or that she had misspoken, I asked her to clarify. And she did. She was confident her daughter was not at risk.

Though that is an extreme example, I have found many moms who believe the lie that they cannot control or that they do control what their daughter believes.



Can you really control how your daughter turns out? Read Nancy’s thoughts in chapter 8 of *Lies Women Believe*.

Consider this: *What’s the difference between being responsible for nurturing your daughter in Truth and controlling her behavior?*

The Truth is that God wants you to do everything you can to plant seeds of Truth in your daughter. No matter how overwhelmed you may feel by her behavior or circumstances, you are charged with the task of being faithful to present Truth. In a key Old Testament passage, the Scripture emphasizes how intentionally and carefully we must approach the work of teaching Truth to our children. ▼



TRUTH NUGGET: “Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:7–9)

This may not be easy for you. Like me, you’ll have days where you feel ill-equipped for the issue at hand. Even in the best of circumstances, you may face challenges.

But some moms have special hardships. For example, in the focus groups we conducted for this book, many shed tears as they spoke of having daughters whose fathers—sometimes in the home and sometimes not—were unbelievers. One stepmother told me that her eleven-year-old daughter spends half of her life in her home, and half of the time with her biological mom who is an atheist. The girl is often told that Christianity is “a crutch” for weak people.

Don’t let your emotions cause you to parent out of fear. Yes, Truth will always have enemies and opposition, but don’t let that stop you from planting Truth in your girl.

God took the time to make sure Adam and Eve knew the truth about the tree, knowing Satan would lie to them. He even told them of the dire consequences of failing to obey Him. ▼



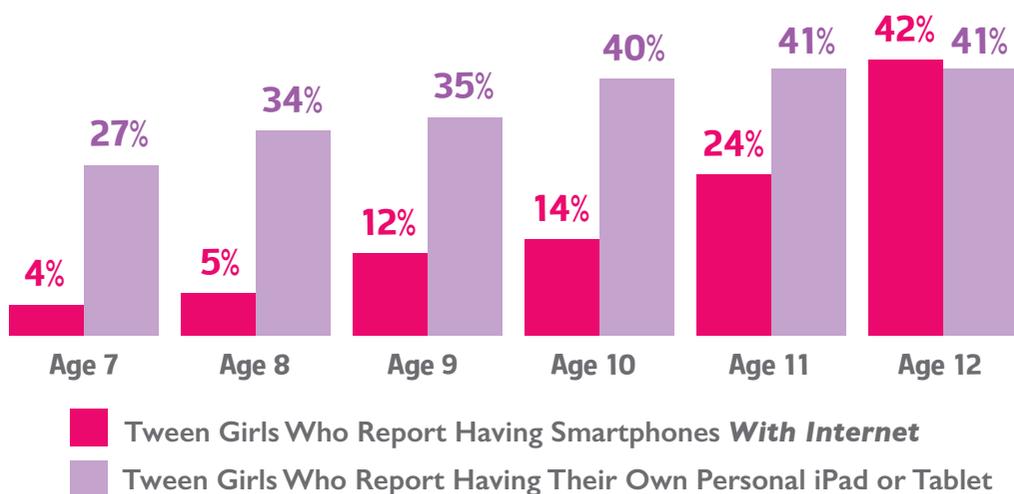
TRUTH NUGGET: “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” (Genesis 2:16–17)

God planted Truth in His precious first son and daughter.

I know that sometimes your emotions feel conflicted when you have to do the same. Have you ever considered how the God of the Universe may have felt when He spoke those words to His children? God’s emotions are never expressed sinfully, with distortion, or outside of His holiness, but He does feel. Was there some sadness within Him when He spoke these words, knowing Satan would come with the lies? And yet, He spoke the Truth, nonetheless.

It is crucial for us to follow this example and tell our children about the temptations we know they will face. In the pages of *Lies Girls Believe*, I’ve tried to bring some of those topics up in a safe environment where you can be in the driver’s seat of presenting Truth to your daughter. In the first chapter, your daughter meets a fictional girl named Zoey.

Zoey is facing the temptation to get on social media behind her parents’ backs. She has her own form of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Her parents have allowed many ways for her to connect with her friends, but social media is one form of connection that they think she is not ready to experience yet.



Based on our Lies Girls Believe survey of 1,531 girls aged 7–12, 69% of whom claimed to be Christians. Presumed to be predominately from active evangelical Christian homes.

Let me be honest with you: there were lengthy conversations with the publishing team about whether or not to include social media as a prominent storyline at the beginning of your daughter’s book. It was a difficult decision because we all agreed that if your daughter is under the age of thirteen, she does not have the developmental and emotional maturity required to navigate social media. (And, sometimes then, it is still too soon.) Even the creators of the social media apps themselves set recommended age limits, usually stating that an individual cannot create an account before the age of thirteen. Those restrictions exist for a reason.

If you are a mom who has respected the recommended age limits, I applaud you. It’s not easy. You’re swimming upstream. One mom said, “Most of my daughter’s eleven-year-old friends have Instagram accounts, but I’m holding out. I feel like I’m all alone.”

It may feel like it, but you’re not alone. There are many moms still respecting the suggested age restrictions. And all moms should consider them.

If your daughter is on social media, I plead with you to carefully consider the impact it can have on her. Since its debut into pop culture, it has severely increased problems girls were already facing, including but not limited to





A CASE STUDY: CANDACE

Candace wanted Snapchat. She kept bringing it up to her parents, making a logical case for why she needed it. But her parents told her “no” several times. They were resolute, believing that she was not old enough.

Eventually, the pleading stopped, and Candace’s parents were relieved that their daughter had finally dropped the topic.

But, one day, she left her phone on the kitchen counter. As her mom walked by, it lit up and vibrated. Glancing down, her mom read the message: “Jason accepts your invitation to Snapchat.”

Her mom said, “She was completely deceptive! She even lied to me when I confronted her about it. I can hardly wrap my head around it.”

body-image issues. The number one eating disorder clinic in the nation released this information in a statement about how the media impacts the risk of a girl having an eating disorder:

In early 2016, scientists reported evidence linking the use of social media with body image issues in young people. This included dieting, body surveillance, a strong desire for thinness and self-objectification. Although social media sites are not the cause of eating disorders, they are a factor in the development of body image issues.⁸

The two most popular apps among teen girls right now—Instagram and Snapchat—are causing a lot of sticky feelings that make girls feel depressed, ugly, and stressed. There is even a new word in the dictionary—FOMO—to describe the Fear Of Missing Out that many girls experience when they see their friends included in things when they are not.

Since I don’t think your daughter should be on social media, it might seem odd that I chose to use this storyline in her book. Here’s the thing: I heard story after story of moms begging me to sound an alarm. One of them was a mom who told me the account in the first case study to the left. It is the basis for Zoey’s storyline.

In the end, the topic of social media use made it into your daughter’s book because I believe that you and I must proactively talk to our daughters about the temptations we know exist. Just as God spoke to Adam and Eve about the temptation they would face in the Garden of Eden and what would happen if they didn’t respect it, we should also speak to our girls about Truth and the consequences of ignoring it. Social media is only one of many important subjects we’ll cover with your daughter as we seek to plant Truth deep into her being.

While you are responsible to plant seeds of Truth, it is also true that you are not in control of your daughter’s belief system. One day she will stand before God and give account for her own beliefs (Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:29–30).

If the story of Adam and Eve demonstrates anything, it is this: God does not seek to restrain us. He could have built a wall to keep Adam and Eve from the Tree. He could have placed a canyon or moat around it. He could have caused the Tree not to blossom and grow fruit. There were many ways He could have controlled the outcome. He is God, and He is Sovereign. But He gave His children the freedom to choose between right and wrong. Why?

Because He wanted it to be real. He wanted their behavior to be an authentic reflection of their heart—of the roots beneath the fruit of their behavior.

Your daughter's behaviors—the things you can see—are the result of things you cannot see. Under

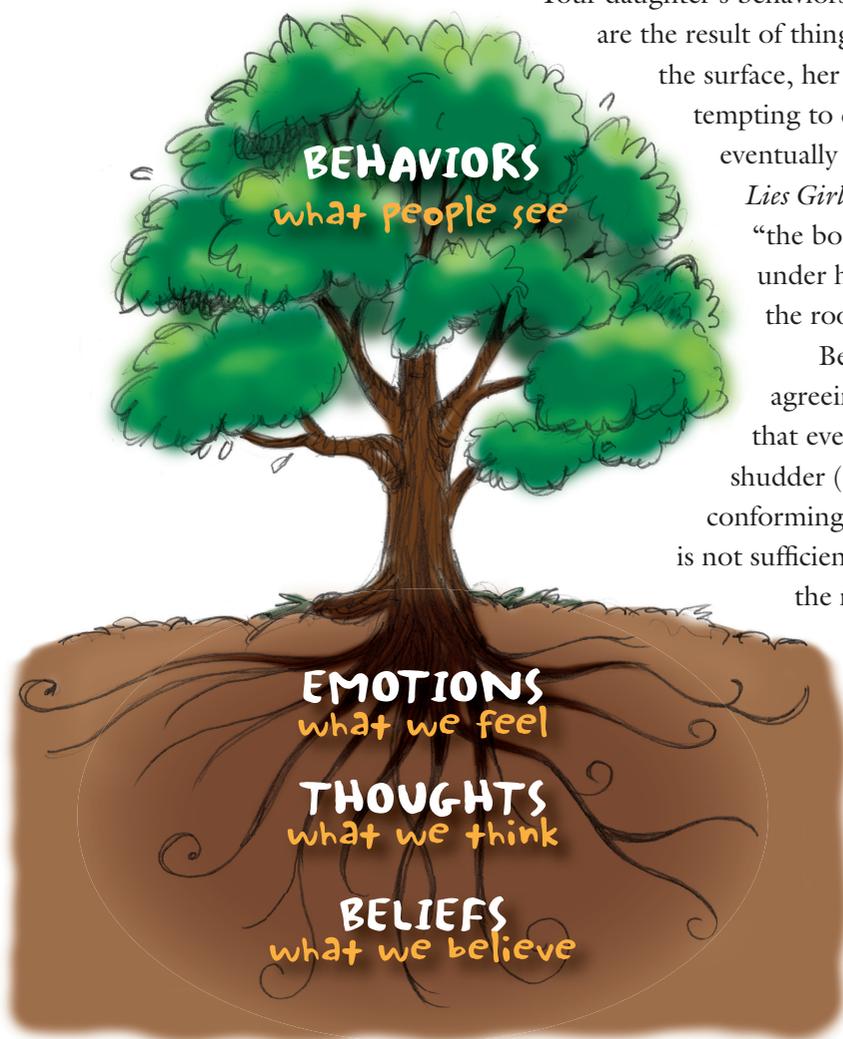
the surface, her emotions are at work attempting to direct her life. But, as I will eventually explain in the last pages of *Lies Girls Believe*, her thoughts are “the boss of” her feelings. And, just under her thoughts, her beliefs are the roots in charge of everything.

Believing Truth is not merely agreeing with it. The Bible says that even the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). And simply conforming our behavior to Truth is not sufficient. The Pharisees obeyed the rules faithfully, but Jesus

called them “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27). They looked good on the outside, but on the inside . . . not so much.

I'm not saying that you should not control and direct your daughter's behavior. It is your responsibility to set healthy boundaries for her. Nothing concerns me

more than when parents allow their children to call all the shots, as if they have no say in the matter. Your daughter is not ready to make most of her choices alone, such as when she'll date, what social media she'll have access to, what television and movies to watch, or even what kind of schooling is best for her. At this stage, she still needs you to help her make good choices, so she can slowly and steadily learn how to do it for herself as she moves toward adulthood.



IS YOUR DAUGHTER'S BEHAVIOR REAL?

In his dissertation entitled *The Nature of True Virtue*⁸, Jonathan Edwards explains that there are two kinds of virtue. That is, there are two kinds of behavior that demonstrate high standards.

Common virtue is doing what is right but with false motives. You do the right thing out of fear, selfishness, or pride. For example, your daughter may be honest because she doesn't want to get in trouble. As we grow older, sometimes we're honest because we're prideful. We don't want to be like "those people" who are liars. This kind of virtue is not deeply rooted in Truth and seeks self-glory. Most people have common virtue.

True virtue is doing what is right because God is God. We are honest because God said to be. Period. This is rooted in God's Truth and is for His glory. Most people are willing to settle for the first form of virtue; few people pursue *true virtue*. But that should be what we are seeking to plant in our daughters.

But you can't *just* control and direct her. That's a recipe for trouble down the road. She needs to understand *why* you have established boundaries for her, and that happens as you plant seeds of Truth. There is a difference between simply controlling her behavior, and setting boundaries *while* you thoroughly nurture her in Truth.

Many of us face the risk of restraining our daughter's behavior out of fear. We work hard to control her behavior, so there is as little room as possible for failure. We try to keep sin and temptation far away from our families, and sometimes shelter our daughter so efficiently that she essentially becomes a monk. Simply restraining external behavior may seem efficient and easier in the short-run, but the long-term outcome is dubious because we haven't cultivated in her a love for Truth. We've essentially decreased the chances of her making wise behavioral choices when we aren't around.

♥ **A critical ingredient to nurturing your daughter with Truth is grace. In this model, you treat your daughter like God treated Eve. You plant Truth, but also expect the battle to be thick. You know your daughter will sin, and you prepare to respond with the same grace we have received from Christ. You talk openly about sin and temptation, and encourage your daughter to be involved in decision-making.**

Nurturing a child in Truth is time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, but the long-term outcome is a young woman who has the roots of Truth established so she can make godly decisions even when you aren't there.

Will you be a mother who merely restrains your daughter's external behavior so it appears to conform to Truth?

OR

Will you nurture her in Truth so that her external behavior is an outgrowth of what is planted deep inside of her heart?

Which will it be?

The friend I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was faced with that choice when she discovered her daughter had gotten on social media behind her back, and posted a photo

of her own self-harm. Though everything in her wanted to respond in fearful control, instead she chose the more laborious approach to nurture her in Truth.

She began by asking her daughter what kind of thoughts she was thinking that led her to cut her wrist open. Her daughter tearfully began to speak mature, dark words. They were the words some boys at school had used as they bullied her, and words no girl should ever have to hear, but my friend's sweet daughter had begun to believe they might be true.

Then, my friend and her husband told their daughter that they needed help as a family. Within hours, their pastor was visiting to pray with and talk with them. They approached it as a family crisis, rather than just pointing fingers at their tween daughter.

Then began the long, hard on-going conversation to rip up lies by the root and plant Truth that heals.

Of course, there were some practical consequences and loss of privileges, but the focus was on this sweet little one's heart. Not her behavior.

As I write this almost one year has passed, and those two are still having a strong conversation as my friend nurtures her daughter in Truth.



TALKING WITH GOD:

Use Deuteronomy 6:6-9 to write a prayer to God. Examine your own heart and consider whether you are planting Truth in your daughter—and any other children in your home—as carefully and thoroughly as this verse commands. Write your honest petitions to God in the lines below.

Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:7-9)



TALKING WITH YOUR GIRL:

After your daughter reads chapter 1 in *Lies Girls Believe*, turn to page 24 and discuss her study of Genesis 3:1-7. Praise her if she has been diligent. Help her if she needs it.

Then, turn to page 29 where she wrote down what advice she would give Zoey about the temptation to disobey her parents. Discuss her ideas.