

Chosen, Called, and Favored

A DEVOTIONAL FOR MOTHERS RAISING CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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About the Author



Jeff Davidson
1967 - 2017

In 2010, God gave Jeff Davidson a clear vision and calling to expand Rising Above to a national ministry. He and his wife Becky stepped out in faith to devote themselves full-time to the ministry. Rising Above began producing small group curriculums for parents of children affected by special needs. These curriculums are now being used in churches and groups around the world. It was an earth-shattering loss when, in May of 2017, Jeff passed away unexpectedly. Jeff lived his life in service to the special-needs community and even now his message continues to impact families. His legacy lives on in all that Rising Above does.

How to use this resource?

This resource can be used as a small group curriculum or as a personal reflection and study.

If you are utilizing this as small group curriculum, you can download and print a copy for everyone in your group. You can read the devotional content together or individually before you meet.

Then, your small group leader can walk you through each of the discussion questions.

"The Next Step" is meant to be a way for you to go deeper. You can work on the Next Step as "homework" or complete the assignment with your small group.

We would love to hear your feedback. Email us at info@risingaboveministries.org. Thank you and we hope your small groups are filled with a deepening of your relationships with one another and with our Heavenly Father.



Chosen, Called, and Favored

For many years, Jeff Davidson shared wisdom and insight from his unique perspective as a special-needs dad on his blog, GoodnightSuperman.com. The writings contained in this study were first published there, and we are excited to make them available in this format for special-needs parents around the world. Jeff's conviction was that each parent of a child with special needs was called to and chosen for their role, and it is our hope that these sessions will inspire men and women to pursue that extraordinary legacy in their individual families.

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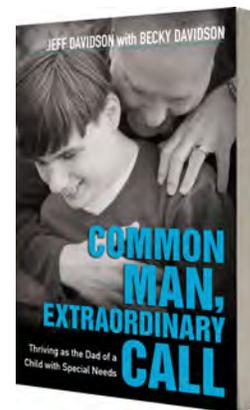
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If you are interested in reading more encouraging insights from the heart of Jeff Davidson, his book ***Common Man, Extraordinary Call*** can be found on Amazon or anywhere books are sold. This book will challenge, equip, and inspire fathers of children with special needs to embrace the calling God has given them to be the committed men their families need.





Session 1

Because Every Day

Originally published May 9, 2014

My son doesn't even know that this Sunday is Mother's Day.

His cognitive challenges and developmental disabilities preclude him from even understanding what Mother's Day is all about. So, by himself, there won't be any presentation of gifts to his mom.

There won't be any special card he picked out for the occasion. There won't be a handmade present or even a "Happy Mother's Day" comment, since he is non-verbal as well. Mother's Day to him will just be like every other day.

He will wake up at 4:00 am as usual because he has no concept of time and thinks that since he woke up, it's time for everyone to rise. So his mom will get up with him to change him, take him a favorite toy, or start a favorite video. Many times she will also have to change his sheets in the night as well.

He is on a very special diet with no casein, no gluten, no soy, and no processed foods at all. So, she will begin the process of not just cooking his breakfast, but also cooking his lunch and dinner as well. All day long.

She prepares his medications for the day. She has to put his pills into tiny capsules for him, because he won't swallow pills. Then, she pulls out clothes for him, cleans him up, and dresses him.

As she feeds him breakfast, she will pray over him and their day. It's a holy moment. They pray for protection, blessing, safety, and God's favor on his life. They pray for his teachers, his classroom helpers and therapists, family members, and a long list of people who haven't been introduced to Jesus yet.

She speaks affirmation and encouragement over Jon Alex telling him how proud she is of him, and how glad she is that he is her son.

Next, she drives him to school and goes to work herself, ministering to and encouraging other moms of special-needs children like herself all day long.

Afternoons, after school, are full of doctor's appointments, therapies, laundry, household chores, ministry obligations, and tending to his every need.



He requires 24/7 care in all things so he can't just be left to entertain himself for very long at all. He constantly needs her attention for even the smallest things.

She swings him in his platform swing, prepares our dinner, and holds everything together until I get home from work to help.

While I feed him his dinner, she eats hers standing up because she is multi-tasking, simultaneously doing other things. Tonight, she is trying to find shoes that will fit over his braces online and working on an upcoming event at the same time. Her allotted dinnertime is about 7-8 minutes.

As I do his nighttime swinging time with him, she does the dishes and cleans the kitchen.

Next, she runs his bath (his favorite activity of the day), makes sure the bath lift is in working order, and gets his clothes ready for the next day.

For the next 45 minutes, as he lays in the bath, she will sing to him. Over and over, she will sing his favorite songs, as he lies there with the most content, happiest smile on his face.

She dresses him for bed and walks him to the edge of his bed, praying softly over him the whole time.

That's when it happens.

That's the moment you just can't miss.

That's the moment when God smiles, and I tear up.

Just before he lies down, he will throw his arms around her neck. He will tilt his head to the side. And very gently, with a toothy grin on his face, he leans in and he kisses his mother on the cheek.

Every night.

Always.

Every night ends with a kiss on her cheek.

Because every day is Mother's Day to my son Jon Alex. Neither one of them needs a card to prove it.



Discussion

1. As a mom of a child with special needs, what feelings does Mother's Day bring to mind for you?
2. How does Mother's Day typically look for your family?
3. Do you have a favorite Mother's Day memory with your child(ren)? Share your answer with your small group if you feel comfortable.
4. What are some daily gifts your child gives you as his/her mother?

The Next Step

Reflect on how the perspective that Jeff shared in this session can spark gratitude instead of resentment when Mother's Day doesn't look the way you anticipated it would look. Make a list of things you are thankful for daily in your role as a mom raising a child with special needs.



For Prayer & Journaling

Father, some of the expectations that I had for Mother's Day were...

When I think about these unmet expectations, I feel...

Father, when I think about celebrating every day as Mother's Day, I am most thankful for...

Father, I thank you for my child and the unique ways we experience Your presence and grace in our daily lives. Today help me remember the truth that...



Session 2

A Valentine's Letter to Mom

Originally published February 14, 2014

No chocolates. No flowers. Not even a card.

You say to yourself "That's OK. What I really wanted was a nap anyway."
But you didn't get that either.

The dishes still lay untouched in the sink. The baskets of unfolded clothes are stacked on top of each other like planes circling the airport.

Another bill lies unopened on the kitchen counter. You don't even want to open it tonight. So, you just leave it there with the others - all unopened, as well.

Your biggest hope for this Valentine's night is that you won't be changing your child's sheets at 3am like last night.

You don't even know what you feel anymore. Sometimes you wonder if you have any feeling left at all. The numbness just envelops you.

Your bed beckons but you don't have the strength to get up and go to the bedroom. So, you just collapse on the couch.

Instead of flowers and candies at work today, you got a call from your child's therapist and a denial letter from your insurance company.

Instead of a romantic dinner out tonight for Valentines, you had french fries and chicken chunks because for 5 nights in a row that is the only thing your child with special needs would eat.

Somewhere they are dancing tonight. You aren't even sure your shoes match.

But, I watched you today. I watched you lay down your life over and over for that child. I watched you love unconditionally. I watched you give sacrificially.

I watched you give of yourself until there was nothing left of you to give.

I saw everything.

I heard everything.

And when you cried yourself to sleep and muffled your tears in your pillow; well, I heard that too. In fact, I collected those tears and kept them in a bottle.

But, I heard something else you didn't.



I know how much you long to hear your son speak. I know the depths of your desires to just hear him say, "I love you mom." I know how frustrating it is for both of you.

Well, tonight when he lay in his bed, I heard something you didn't mom. I heard him go on and on to me about how much he loves you, he needs you, and how you are his world mom.

He and I speak of you all the time. While this world had robbed of him of his ability to communicate to you, he speaks clearly through his spirit to me. We share a language not of this world. And in that language known only to us, he tells me of his love for you all the time.

His body and mind may be disabled, Mom, but there are no disabled souls.

You are his valentine every day...not just today.

He loves you, Mom.

You give him life. I like to think you got that from me.

And one other thing.

Never ever forget. Never forget.

I love you too, my daughter. I chose you. I called you. I created you.

My eyes saw your unformed body when I knit you together in your mother's womb.

Your frame was not hidden from me.

You and your child are fearfully and wonderfully made.

I cherish you. I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you. I will never stop loving you. You are never alone.

Be my valentine.

- Your Dad,
God





Discussion

1. Read Psalm 56:8. How does it make you feel to read that God keeps track of your sorrows and tears?
2. Do you believe that God chose, called, and created you to be your child's mom? Why or why not?
3. Read Psalm 139. We are often quick to apply this passage to the lives of our children. How does the truths in these verses encourage you when applied to your own life?
4. Read Deuteronomy 31:6. How can knowing that the Lord "will never leave you or forsake you" empower you to "be strong and courageous" in your daily journey as a mother to a child with special needs?

The Next Step

After reading the scriptures above, take a moment to think about what your Father God might say to you in your current season of life, with the challenges and circumstances surrounding you. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any specific encouragement for your heart in these scriptures.



For Prayer & Journaling

Father, when I think about You taking account of my sorrows and collecting my tears in a bottle, some specific ones that come to mind are...

After reading Psalm 139, a specific truth that stands out to me is...

Father, I do not feel strong and courageous when...

Father, I thank you for your Word and the truth that is strong enough to combat exhaustion, anxiety, worry, and hopelessness. As I go forward into a new week, please remind me of the truth that...



Session 3

Special-Needs Moms are my Heroes (And I Married One)

Originally published May 9, 2017

It's 3:45 in the morning. He's up so she's up. Another early morning wake-up call, courtesy of autism. He can't tell time so when he wakes up he assumes it's time to start his morning.

She is so tired and weary, begging God to give her enough grace to make it through the day. Before the day is over she will cook all his meals, give him his meds, change his sheets, dress him, change him, bathe him, do load after load of laundry, entertain him, and take care of his every need from the moment he wakes up until he goes to bed.

All the typical things a mom does for a newborn, right?

Except her son is nineteen years old. Physically he is a man, intellectually he is just a baby in many ways. It gets harder with the passing of each year.

She holds her tongue and bites back the tears when a friend complains that she hasn't had a vacation in a couple of years. Her last vacation was ten years ago and resulted in her husband getting deathly sick.

She would cry, but that would require energy she just doesn't have.

On top of everything else, her husband has chronic health issues of his own. In the past two years, he has lost his kidneys and his left foot. She has become not only her son's caregiver, but in many ways, her husbands, as well. Somehow they both continue work full-time because they feel God has called them to serve other families like theirs.

But, she is exhausted. Her emotional tank is depleted, and compassion fatigue threatens to envelop her. Before this day is over, she will mentor and counsel many other special-needs moms who need her help as well, with no mention or regard of her own needs.

When I was growing up, my heroes were sports figures. I idolized Larry Bird, Julius Erving, and anyone on the Pittsburgh Steelers or the Cincinnati Reds. I confused greatness with athletic talent.

Boy, was I ever wrong.



Greatness is living your life as a caregiver because you genuinely feel that God has chosen and called you to that walk in life. Greatness is dying to yourself every day and laying down your own wants and desires as you serve others. Greatness is being the hands and feet of Jesus to your own family, and then to others as well.

No, she won't get any medals to hang around her neck. But tonight, like every night, after she gets her son out of the bath, he will wrap his still wet arms around her neck, and kiss her on the cheek.

She will take that around her neck any day over a medal.

My wife has become my hero and I am in awe of her. She is everything I am not, and at the same time, she is everything I wish I was. Nothing I can do for her on Mother's Day can express my love and admiration enough.

I have a message for all the moms raising a child with special needs or a disability. I know you sometimes look enviously on Facebook at the other moms and their "perfect Facebook families." I know sometimes you long for a simpler life, or the life you imagined you would have had before your child was born. I know sometimes you feel all alone, misunderstood, and how you crave community and a sense of belonging.



I know you wonder how you're going to make it through another day sometimes.

But you do. You get up every day with self-determination and grit, and you face your giants head on right before you punch them in the face.

You are a special needs mom. Ain't no one tougher, stronger, or more resilient.

And every time you love unconditionally or serve sacrificially, all of heaven stands up to applaud and give you a standing ovation.

Well done, moms!



Discussion

1. In this session Jeff says, "Greatness is living your life as a caregiver because you genuinely feel that God has chosen and called you to that walk in life." Do you embrace that you are chosen for and called to your role as a special-needs mom?
2. When you grow weary, what gives you the strength to get up every day "with self-determination and grit?"
3. Read Hebrews 12:1-2. How can "looking to Jesus" encourage us when we are serving our children sacrificially?
4. What are some practical ways you are the hands and feet of Jesus to your family every day? Do you view this as greatness?

The Next Step

Who are the people you would consider heroes in your life? Take a moment to consider who has had the biggest impact on your own life and why. Most often we realize these people did not influence us through one huge event, but through many small, intentional acts of love and caring. Take a moment to pray, thanking God for these individuals.



For Prayer & Journaling

Father, I confess I do not always feel like a hero to my child when...

This week, I will hold onto the truth that...

Father, I will remember that all of heaven is cheering me on when...

Thank you, Lord, for Jesus' perfect example of self-sacrifice. May I run the race before me with my gaze fixed on His glory and grace, even through His suffering. Please remind me of this especially when...



Session 4

Chosen, Called, Favored

Originally published December 23, 2015

Never in her wildest dreams could she have imagined this would happen. It certainly wasn't the path she had planned out for her life.

When she initially got the news she was stunned. After all, this pregnancy wasn't even expected in the first place. But to then get the news that this child wouldn't be typical...well, no one originally plans or even dreams of giving birth to a special child.

She had learned that this baby wouldn't be typical while he was still in her womb prior to giving birth. But as she tried to comprehend what that meant, she struggled to grasp the whole picture. She must have wondered, "What is my life going to look like now?"

Her whole world was going to be turned upside down. This child's uniqueness would impact every single aspect of her life. She really didn't realize how hard the early years would be for her and her baby as they tried to come to terms with their "new normal."



She felt all alone and isolated. It was such a rare condition that she felt like no one else around her could possibly understand or relate to her experience.

She worried she would lose friends. She worried that her family would turn their backs as well.

And she feared her husband would drown in denial, anger, and bitterness like so many dads of special children. What if he became just another vacant dad? What if he couldn't figure out how to be engaged or involved so he just checked out?

The sleepless nights. The curious looks. And all those questions from family members who just didn't really understand.



Someone had told her that she was chosen. Someone had tried to convince her that God had a hand in this somehow. But that was hard for her to believe sometimes.

Here she was, feeling all alone and isolated, with no one she could talk to who would understand or could relate to her experiences.

How could God have really chosen her to be the mom of a special child?

Sounds familiar doesn't it? We know and hear of special families who go through something like this all the time, don't we? Maybe you relate to some of this in your own personal experiences.

If so, you certainly can relate then to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is the mother of the special child I'm referring to in the story I just wrote.

Mary would have related to so many of you, and your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. After all, Mary was the mother of a "special" child herself.

That "someone" who told her God had chosen and called her? That someone was a personal messenger from God, an angel named Gabriel. He had greeted Mary by saying "Greetings most favored one, the Lord is with you."

Mary was chosen and called to be the mother of a very special child, the Son of God. God picked her and God found favor on her.

Chosen and called. Picked by God Himself to be the gift-keeper for the world's greatest gift.

And what about you dear mothers of children with special needs? God has chosen you, as well. God has called you, and you have found favor in Him. You, too, are the gift-keeper for one of His most prized gifts.

No matter how overwhelmed you get, no matter how often you despair, no matter how hard you struggle, no matter how intense your pain can be at times, you are favored.

Through the exhaustion, through the feelings of inadequateness, through the struggle to understand why—the fact remains that God chose you and called you.

From Mary to you, God has a heart for the mothers of special children. May He fill your heart with that love, and may you let it sustain you.

The Lord's favor is upon you!



Discussion

1. Read Luke 1:26-38. What do you think Mary was feeling in response to Gabriel's message to her?
2. How did you feel when you first received your child's diagnosis? Do you think there were similarities between Mary's experience and your own?
3. Read Isaiah 43:1-2. How can these promises uphold you through the exhaustion and weariness that often fill our days?
4. Read Ephesians 2:10. We would all agree that taking care of our children is "good work." How does it make you feel to know that God planned this work for you in advance?

The Next Step

When you look back at your life as a special-needs mom, do you see it through a lens of God's favor? Consider writing out your story and taking time to celebrate the places where you see God's choosing, calling, and favor on your life.



For Prayer & Journaling

Father, I see your favor over my life when I remember...

I struggle to see Your favor when...

One truth from this series that I especially want to hide in my heart is...

Father, I trust that You have called me by name and I am Yours. I pray for a new revelation of Your calling over my life, and eyes open to see Your favor and provision. Please help me be awake to Your goodness and love, especially when...



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