

# Preparing for an Appointment by Kimberly Ehlers



I received an e-mail from a sweet friend this weekend. Her little boy has an appointment coming up in a couple of weeks. She's worried all that could happen that day – will they get bad results from the tests, will he have to go through a procedure that's painful for him, what will they find out?

As I read her e-mail, the memories flooded back. I relate to her worry, and I'm sure you do to.

As an infant, my son had check ups with the cardiologist every 3 months. It was obvious almost immediately that God was working in his heart, making parts grow that we were told couldn't grow. When they realized that they would not be doing surgery as soon as they had thought (at 6 months), our schedule changed to every six months and then, eventually, to once a year.

Even with all the positive things God was doing in Seth's heart, I dreaded the day I would open our mailbox and see the reminder of our upcoming visit from the hospital. We would receive that notice a month before our appointment. Not only did it tell us the date and time to be there but it marked the beginning of 30 days of torturous thoughts. Painful memories and fears of the future filled my mind. I remembered too clearly our life in the hospital – Seth's first 3 weeks of life. I worried too easily of what might come.

During this time, it was all too easy to let my imagination run wild and project other children's heart defects and their resulting surgeries onto Seth. I would remember another child we had met, and think of the prognosis and path of treatment their parents had told us about. Even though the child had a completely different defect or set of defects than Seth's, suddenly, I would believe there was a possibility Seth would face the same outcome. I would worry, "Will Seth be so sick too?" It was hard to meet children who suffered so much, went through so many surgeries and still were sick. If they have to have surgery, shouldn't it do more than save their life? Shouldn't it improve their life? I couldn't bear the thought of any more surgery. One open heart was more than enough, thank you. In those 30 days of waiting, I worried about every surgery possible and

impossible. My mind might know it was a ridiculous thought, but my heart couldn't believe it. My illogical heart always won the battle.

But, eventually, over time I did learn something. I hate to tell you how long it took me to learn it, I'm sure you aren't as thick headed as me. Honestly, it's still something I have to practice. Even with great health, Praise God, I find those old fears and worries will try to work their way back into my life. It actually still happened to me again just a couple of months ago, before Seth's latest appointment. I was more prepared this time and dealt with the bad thoughts without letting them control me.

You may not get a letter in the mail that triggers your anxiety. Your time of worrying about an appointment may be longer or shorter. However long it is, there is something you can do to have victory over this stress.

There are **three vital components** to getting through this month of waiting: stay close to God, communicate with your spouse, and give yourself grace.

I confess that I failed at that last part. This was the hardest month of the year for me and it was also the month I was hardest on myself. Do you relate to that?

Let's look at each of these components more closely. We'll also talk about preparing your child:

## **1<sup>st</sup> – Stay Close to God**

We can't do any of this without being close to God. What does that mean exactly? It means that we spend time reading His Word daily. I like to spend time in prayer before reading Scripture. I pray for a variety of things, but especially wisdom and my son's health. I close my prayer asking God to write His Words upon my heart. Then, while I'm reading, I'm also listening. What does God want to teach me? Some people enjoy following plans to read through the Bible in a year, I know my husband gets so much out of doing that. I prefer to read until something hits me and makes me stop to think about what it means for me. Some days I read multiple chapters, some days it's just one verse. Do whatever connects you to God and His powerful Word.

I talk about this more extensively in "[The Faith Challenge](#)", but I HIGHLY recommend creating a "Praise" CD. Fill it with just songs that make you praise and worship God. As much as we relate to and love the beautiful

Christian songs that really cry out to God over our pain, we need to leave them for another CD. Ask yourself, "Does this song glorify God? Could it be sung in His throne room?" Think, "Praise, praise, and more praise!"

Why? Talk about an incredible way to relieve stress! If you're worshipping the Father, your brain doesn't have the chance to worry. Plus, praising God is empowering – after all, it's connecting you to the Creator!

Sometimes, though, I feel so controlled by stress. It fills my thoughts and my shoulders are so tight, they're up to my ears. Those are the times that I know I can't connect with God unless I relieve some stress first. The only way for me to calm my insides down enough to be able to focus on God is by exercising. Taking a stroll with a friend is nice, but to really benefit from the stress relief that exercise provides, I need to be challenged. The exercise world talks about the release of the "feel good" endorphins, but that's actually a pretty controversial subject. What I know to be true is that when I exercise in a way that makes me work hard enough to breathe heavily and sweat, I mentally feel better. Talk to your doctor first. Then find a workout you enjoy and challenge yourself. (Another reason I love my non-contact kickboxing – I can picture my stressor and punch and kick it away 😊.)

Exercise is another opportunity to think about something else besides your child's health. BUT, we also have to realize that God made us holistic beings. We are just all spiritual or mental. We can't spend every waking hour in solitary prayer day in and day out, it isn't practical and we'll end up depleting ourselves physically. We also can't just think about everything, sometimes we have to take action. Sometimes, as Christians, we forget the importance of taking care of our temples. We're not talking about vanity. We're talking about caring for the physical bodies God has gifted us with. When we do that, our level of stress lowers, we have fewer health issues ourselves, and we're glorifying God.

## **#2 Communicate With Your Spouse**

Our spouses are our gifts. They're an extension of God's love in human form to be our friend, our support, and our help in decision making. When a worry pops up, we need to say, "Hey, Hon, I've been worrying about this...". When we voice our worries out loud, they lose some of their power over us. Some of our fears are valid, but when we speak them, we share them. The burden they cause lessens because we no longer carry them alone. If you're like me and develop unrealistic fears, hearing them voiced helps your brain and your heart to accept the truth. You

understand more clearly that the worry doesn't make sense and can reject it more easily.

We need to remember that we made a vow with our spouse to stick together through sickness and health. At the time, we thought it just meant our health, we never imagined that it would be our child who was sick. We honor our vows and walk this journey together as man and wife. That walk begins with communicating.

### **#3 Give Yourself Grace**

No, we're not writing free passes to sin. We're acknowledging that our situation is hard and we're going to make mistakes. When we do make mistakes, we have our Advocate, Jesus. We go to God and earnestly ask for forgiveness in the name of our Savior, then we accept it.

We need to imagine if one of our friends were in our situation. How would we respond to them and their mistakes? We'd encourage them wouldn't we? We wouldn't want them to be so hard on themselves. Give yourself the grace that you would give your friend. As Paul talked about in **Philippians 3:13-14**, forget the past and move forward. Start again.

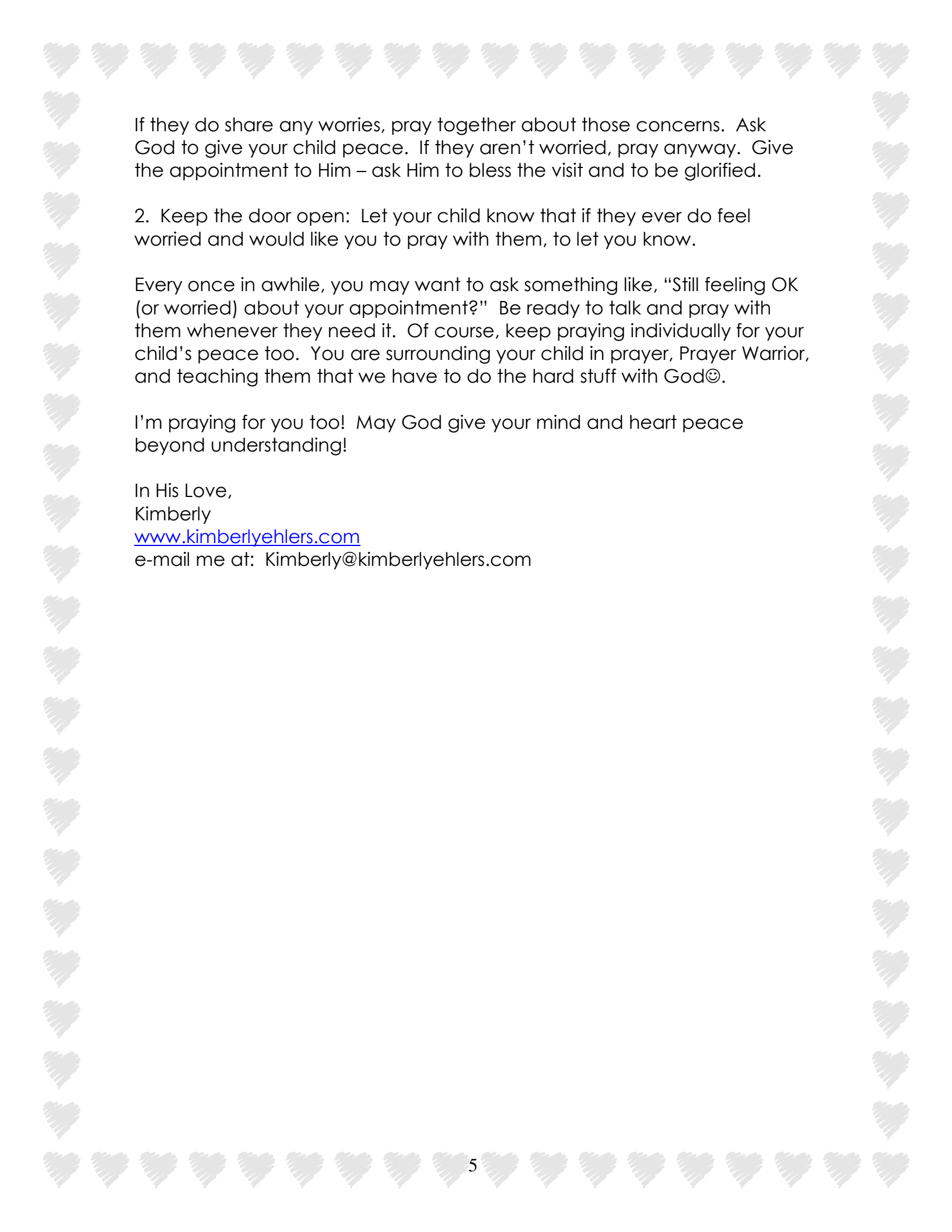
One of the ways we can do that is to constantly give our worries and the whole upcoming appointment to God. It doesn't matter if we have to do that 100 times a day. We need to keep going back and saying, "God, I'm struggling with this worry" or "Father, I feel so nervous/angry and I keep sinning...".

You aren't perfect, but you are the perfect parent for your child. God has certain things He wants your child to learn, that's why you are their parent. Let one of the things they learn be grace.

### **So, how do you help your child prepare for a doctor's visit?**

Keep the door of communication open and follow their lead. Every child is different and every appointment is different. You have to use your wisdom to best meet your child's needs, but I do have some suggestions that could help.

1. Open the door: You can say something as simple as, "You have an appointment coming up. What do you think about that? Is there anything you're worried about?"



If they do share any worries, pray together about those concerns. Ask God to give your child peace. If they aren't worried, pray anyway. Give the appointment to Him – ask Him to bless the visit and to be glorified.

2. Keep the door open: Let your child know that if they ever do feel worried and would like you to pray with them, to let you know.

Every once in awhile, you may want to ask something like, "Still feeling OK (or worried) about your appointment?" Be ready to talk and pray with them whenever they need it. Of course, keep praying individually for your child's peace too. You are surrounding your child in prayer, Prayer Warrior, and teaching them that we have to do the hard stuff with God☺.

I'm praying for you too! May God give your mind and heart peace beyond understanding!

In His Love,  
Kimberly

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