

He has the power to break my heart, fill my heart to overflowing, or turn it to stone. No one person should have that kind of power over another, but he does. With just a few choice words, he can make me feel like a failure, supermom, or the devil incarnate.

I'm talking about my son.

Both of my boys are of the “hard-to-handle” (H2H) type. They're loud, aggressive, passionate, impulsive, and have the ability to make or break my day. Their basic personalities—how God made them and who he made them to be—stretch mine to the limits, and for a girl who struggles to control her emotions anyway, I often find my interactions with them to be an emotional rollercoaster. One minute they're offering to carry the groceries, or protecting the girl next door as her personal space is being violated, the next they're in an all-out brawl on the living room floor.

But it's my youngest son who has the power to reduce me to the monster I didn't even know existed. Here's a classic example:

We sit down to the breakfast table as a family and I'm eager to begin our day from a place of peace. I've worked hard to provide them with a healthy, protein packed breakfast because I know it helps them be more successful throughout the day, and it's good for their brains. But he doesn't like it.

Before he even sits down, the eyes roll, the foot stamps, and his classic response, “REALLY??” has already exploded out of his loud mouth.

The sheer volume of his response immediately makes my heart beat faster and threatens to make me unable to hear him. I'm an introvert, and loud makes me shut down. It's a survival instinct for the person who values quiet. Too much of anything frazzles me and hinders my ability to react well.

I can feel myself boiling inside. It's an almost immediate reaction now after so many mornings of the exact same thing. I can't understand why he does this over and over when he knows what comes next. There's no correction I can find that makes him stop. But I try anyway...

“20 burpies, son,” I say, and he immediately falls down on the floor in a fit of tears. My husband looks at me and says, “you're too quick to react,” and I know he's right, but I can't seem to help it. I feel that I must make him stop or I will lose

my mind. I want him to understand that his behavior is completely unacceptable, and provide a consequence severe enough (without hurting him physically) that it'll make him pause tomorrow. But it never works...

The situation escalates until I send him to eat breakfast alone in his bedroom. He needs a break to get himself together, and I need a break from him...and it's not even 9AM.

I tell people my precious son has a BIG personality, reacting to everything in a BIG way. He's never happy, he's ESTATIC! He's never sad, he's DEVASTATED! And while he's actually an introvert, like me, the thorn in his flesh that I struggle daily to help him overcome is his ability to control his reactions.

He's a classic reactor. But so am I.

As his mom, it's my job to help him overcome in this area. He may always struggle. I still do. But even though the Lord has been graciously giving me more and more victory over my own emotions, I realize that in order to help him have victory over his I have to set the example.

Sometimes it seems like we're in a constant war for control, this boy and me, and something has to change. So I'm stepping out of the war and learning to do battle instead.

10 Ways to Step Out of the War and Into the Battle for Your H2H Boy

This resource is completely, 100% based on my own experience as a mom of two hard-to-handle boys. Before we go any further, I need to tell you that I love them to the moon and back. They're amazing creatures with big, generous hearts. They're loyal, beautiful, and generally (when they're in a good mood), people I love to hang out with. They're fun, and they go after life with passion and zeal. They protect those closest to them without hesitation, and make their dad and me laugh so hard we cry. They're also stubborn, and most of the time, have to learn things the hard way. I love that about them because it reminds me of me.

So while I often tell you the horror stories associated with raising H2H boys, I need you to know there are amazing, wonderful stories, too. I'm convinced God is at work in my boys. They love Jesus, and He has a plan for them. Whether they

end up heroes to the world, or just heroes in their home, I believe God is going to use them for His glory and that they were born for such a time as this. The world needs more stubborn men who have learned to trust God through hard won battles with submission to His will.

That's the kind of man I'm asking God to help me raise.

It's for that reason, that there is so much good underneath the hard-to-handle heart, that I'm actively stepping out of the war and learning to battle instead.

A few notes before we get started?

- Most of the time, learning to do battle for my H2H boys involves battling with myself. I'm the parent, and I can't win if I allow myself to be dragged down to their level. My goal is to rise above and invite them to come with me.
- It's my personal belief and philosophy that God made my boys the way they are. I absolutely refuse to manhandle them emotionally or physically into submission, and I don't want to change who they are. I see my role in their development more like a potter's hands. It's the analogy God uses with us to describe how He molds us and shapes us more into the image of His son, and it's the approach I want to take with my own. He made each of us with distinct and unique personalities. We start off rough around the edges (little sinners), and He lovingly makes us into the best version of us there is. The one that looks a lot like Jesus. If it's good enough for God. It's good enough for me.
- What all this means is that the MOST important part of this battle is allowing God the right to strip me of old, sinful habits that are contributing to the problem, not making it better. My friend, if you want to do this with me, it means the same thing for you. Prepare yourself. But it's worth it.
- This resource provides you with the first steps in this journey. If you want to go deeper, learning to truly understand and fight *for* the heart of your son instead of *against* it, I invite you to join my exclusive *Fight Like a Boymom: Your Roadmap for Raising Hard-to-Handle Boys* program. A new class will be opening very soon.

1. Tell God He can have you.

I made this number one because it's the most important. Literally, none of the other steps matter much at all unless you're willing to let God change you first. If you've

never told Jesus He has the right to be Lord of your life...if you've never placed your faith and trust in Him as your personal Savior, believing He died in your place so your sins could be forgiven...stop and do that now. If you need help, or have questions, email me. My team and I will help you walk through the most important decision you've ever made.

If you've already given Jesus your life, I just have one question for you: *Have you really given Him your life?* Have you surrendered your right to anything other than what He's called you to? Have you really given Him the right to move you, change you, and tell you what to do? Have you submitted your life, personality, and character to His leadership? Have you told Him it's OK to thoroughly and radically make you into a new person?

If not, you might want to consider that right away. I only say that because you'll never be able to get a handle on your hard-to-handle child unless you do. You'll never be able to do this in your own strength, and the best way to teach your children is to model for them what it looks like to live a life fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Some of you might be asking, "I get it, Brooke...but what in the world does that look like in real life?"

One of my very favorite Bible studies, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, talks about this in depth. One of the seven fundamentals described in the book tells us we don't need to ask God what He wants us to do for Him. We don't have to invent anything new to serve Him, or new ways to give our lives to Him. God is already at work all around us. In order to live a fully surrendered life, all we have to do is look around us and see what God is already doing, and join Him in it. If you don't know how to follow Christ in your daily life, take a look around and see where God is already at work, and join Him in it. If you never have before, ask God to open your eyes to ways you can surrender your life to Him more fully.

There are tons of resources available to help you learn to follow Christ in your family and parenting. We have a whole list of resources about godly families and homes at [The MOB Society](#), so check it out.

2. Learn to keep your mouth shut.

I know, this is much easier said than done. Proverbs 17:28 says, "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent," and I believe it's true. My tendency to be a reactor makes it hard for me to keep my mouth shut, especially when I feel like my boys' behavior warrants a good "teaching" session (which is most of the time). I'm a teacher by nature, always seeing the opportunity to share something the Lord has taught me with others. But there's a time and a place for everything, and most of the time, when heated emotions are involved, the time for words is later.

The times when I most feel the need to be heard are often the times I most need to be quiet. If I first pause to pray, and then enter the conversation in control of myself and under the control of the Holy Spirit, things always go better. Next time you feel the need to teach them a lesson burning within you, try forcing yourself to take a five-minute break to communicate with God, first.

3. Get in the habit of prayer.

We all want to hear from the Lord, right? On the surface, every one of us wants to know what God wants us to do so we can just do it and be done. I know that's true for me. I sometimes feel so frustrated with God because it doesn't seem like He wants to give me direction when my heart is ready to do whatever He tells me to. But I've come to this conclusion: most of the time I'm too busy talking to actually hear or see when He *is* speaking to me.

That's why taking a break to pray before I speak, pray before I react, pray before anyone else gets up in the morning, and praying throughout the entire day is so important. God wants to give us direction and comfort, but we're too busy living our lives to remember to ask.

I'm convinced prayer is one of the most important pieces of parenting...not just because we get to intercede for our children, asking God to move in their lives, but because of the way it connects us to His heart for *us*. I started my prayer journey when my boys were very young out of complete desperation. I needed God to do something, *anything*, to help me get my home and heart under control. It started out about changing them, but it ended up changing me.

Because I spent most of my time praying God's word back to Him for my boys (why not, when it always does what God purposes for it to do, Isaiah 55:11), I was

automatically spending more time searching the Bible and seeking to understand it. Little by little, I began to trust God more, not just for my boys, but for myself. The stronger my relationship with Jesus became, the better mother I became.

Find ways to spend time alone with God in His word. I repeat, find ways to spend time alone with God in His word. This is your lifeline. Don't make the mistake of thinking you can do without it. Your hard-to-handle ship will sink faster than you can say, "LIFE PRESERVER!" Seek God in prayer throughout your day, not just once at the beginning. Invite Him into your moments by crying to Him out loud... even and especially right in the middle of your mess. This not only increases your faith, but your children's as well. They need to see that you need Jesus just as much as they do, and you'll be laying a foundation for their own powerful prayer lives as you do.

4. Learn the power of a mommy time out.

The other day I walked in the house from a bad day, told my boys to leave me alone for ten minutes, and I didn't feel bad about it at all.

After years of a reactor lifestyle, I'm learning to recognize my triggers, and that day had been full of them. I knew I was close to snapping and that just a few minutes alone had the power to make all the difference. Usually, I just go lay on my bed and read. Sometimes, I get on my knees and pray for strength. Other times, I write out scripture prayers for the specific situations we're dealing with... whatever I feel led to, or need to do in that moment. It isn't always super-spiritual...sometimes, it's just plain needing a break. My boys are old enough now to be able to understand when mommy needs a break, and give it to me...most of the time.

When my boys were too little, I used nap time as my break, or just put them in the swing and pack-n-play and sat in the other room for five minutes. It doesn't take long to recharge if we know how to do it well.

What makes you feel a healthy sense of relief almost instantaneously? Is it music? A good book? Reading your favorite Bible passage? Getting on your knees in prayer? Whatever it is, and even if it changes by the day, do that. You cannot parent your children well when your heart is a frazzled mess. Even if you have to take five minute "mommy breaks" multiple times a day, do something to get yourself to a place of peace. And remember peace has nothing to do with what's happening around you. Peace comes only from relationship with Jesus Christ. You can't

manufacture it with things or even changes in circumstance. It comes from within as you surrender your life to Christ.

5. Prepare ahead of time.

Just like me, there are certain things that tend to agitate my son very quickly. After studying him for many years now, I'm beginning to recognize these triggers, and know they're coming. It only makes sense for me to be physically, mentally, and spiritually prepared for the inevitable.

For example, when I ask my son to do something, he'll most often say no to me. This flies all over me and we usually end up getting in a fight over it. Instead, when I know I need him to do something, like clean his room, do his math, or read a book (all things he really doesn't enjoy), I don't ask him to do it, I tell him to do it. I'm not mean to him, but I do use my mommy voice that makes it clear he doesn't have an option. I know some experts say it's good to give children options from an early age. I don't think they know hard-to-handle boys. This doesn't mean I'll never let him choose, but he responds better when he knows exactly what's expected of him.

When it's time to leave the pool, I get his attention about twenty minutes beforehand and let him know we're leaving in twenty minutes. Then I give him updates every few minutes so that when it's actually time to leave, he's not taken by surprise.

I also don't allow him to speak disrespectfully to me at home. If he starts to tantrum, or speaks in an ugly tone of voice, I refuse to speak to him altogether. I simply send him to his room to pray and gather control of himself and tell him we'll talk when he's ready to be respectful. It usually only takes him a few minutes to realize he's in the wrong, apologize, and move our communication in the right direction.

Also, I pray a lot. For my response...for his. My son is a Believer in Jesus. He's asked Jesus to be Savior of his life. That means he has the Holy Spirit living inside of him and that I can trust the Holy Spirit to do its job in his life. That's why asking him to go to his room and pray is such a strong and powerful motivator for change. When my son is in the middle of a tantrum, he can't see past it. Removing him from the situation gives the Holy Spirit a chance to rise up in him and convict him of sin. Of course, this assumes you've taught him how to pray, and that you're a

praying mom yourself. If you need help in that department, check out my book, *Praying for Boys: Asking God for the Things They Need Most.*

6. Be stronger.

When I first wrote this, I was immediately transported in my memory back to the many times it has served me well over the years to be physically stronger than my young sons. Now that they're getting older, it's harder for me to physically force them to do something, and honestly, I don't really want to or think that's necessarily healthy.

When they were very young, I would often pick them up and carry them to a safe space for them to calm down (getting kicked and punched the whole way). Now, I can ask them to go somewhere safe, and they will. We're fast approaching the day when they'll be much stronger than I am, so what I'm talking about here isn't really physical strength (although it can be...)...it's emotional and spiritual strength.

You've maybe heard it said that a leader can only take his followers as far as he is. As a parent, you are, by default, a leader. God gave you to your children to teach them, train them, and make it as easy as possible for them to know Him. To lead them well, you don't have to know it all, or have your whole life together, you just have to be a few paces ahead of where they are. This means you need to have a more mature faith than they do. It also means you need to be strong emotionally, because if there's anything I know, it's that kids are often *not* in control of their emotions. Somebody has to be! Commit now to growing in your faith daily and addressing things from your personal life and history that affect you. Be healthy, be whole, be strong in your faith. Then you'll be able to lead them into the same.

7. Love harder.

I want to give you a little sneak peak at one of my favorite parts of the *Fight Like a Boymom* program (you can get access to the whole program when it's open. Until then, sign up for the waiting list here. You'll be the first to know!), just because you're special. My boys fight me a lot. I think that's just built in to the DNA of an H2H boy. As I mentioned before, there are a lot of amazing things about my boys...things that I know one day God will use for His glory and purpose in their lives. But they're raw and unrefined right now...and often drive me crazy.

One day, they'll fight *for* something instead of against it. Until that time, it's my goal to love them harder than they fight me. I talk about the specifics of this in depth inside of the program, but basically, if my boys go to bed each night feeling more loved than fought, more a treasure than a hindrance, and knowing there's nothing they could ever do to make me not love them, I call that day a success.

8. Be a student of your son.

I don't believe there's a biblical formula for parenting success. If it existed, we'd all be doing it, and a lot fewer children would be leaving the church once they hit eighteen. There's no "one-size-fits-all" method when it comes to raising godly men. Sometimes, I wish there was. Other times, I'm glad it's not up to me to change their hearts. God can do a much better job of that than I can.

What is within my power is to study my son, to really know him...know his personality, what makes him happy, what makes him tick, what sets him off, what makes him feel loved. When a parent knows those things, he or she can tailor their parenting to the specific strengths and weaknesses of the child. Personally, I believe this makes all the difference. It empowers the parent to reach the heart of the child...deep down inside...instead of just trying not to be inconvenienced by bad behavior.

It also sets the stage for a solid relationship creating a foundation that is much harder to break than it would be otherwise. When they get older, many things will be vying for their attention, not to mention the snares of the enemy to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). Taking the time to really know your son may make all the difference to his future, and your relationship.

9. Think outside of the box.

No biblical formulas means that what works for your child might not work for mine, and vice versa. As we learn to fight FOR our sons, it becomes apparent that we might have to think outside of the box.

Within the healthy, safe bounds of biblical truth, what are some things you could try with your son to help reach his heart? Here are a few things I've tried over the years, each of which has had some measure of success...

* Instead of giving consequences for bad behavior, I take them out for a treat. Sometimes, when my boys are letting all the sin come out of their hearts, they need

to be corrected. Other times, I just get a feeling from the Lord that we all need a break. Sally Clarkson, one of my favorite mom writers, once told me that on bad days, she used to take her children out for tea. I love that. When we aren't communicating well, and expectations aren't being met...when our emotions are frazzled, and we're more frustrated than forgiving, sometimes we just need to set everything aside and talk. Getting away from our home (aka the scene of the crime) helps.

* Diffusing calming essential oils seems to really take the edge off around here. We've made a concerted effort to put good food into our systems and get rid of toxic things around the house, so we don't use candles much anymore...even though I love them and find them relaxing. Essential oils actually do really good things for our bodies, including helping us relax and focus, so they're a better option for us. If you had known me three years ago, you'd laugh at all the natural stuff I'm into now, but when you're desperate for change, you're willing to try things you'd never been open to before.

* Call him a man. Yes, I know he isn't a mature man yet, but in his heart he is. He was created by God to be a man...not a woman, not a monkey, not some mysterious asexual being. Give it time, and he'll be a real, grown up man. I like holding out a vision for my boys they can grow into. So even though they're not fully capable of making grown man decisions, or managing themselves in a grown man way, they can begin to work towards it. For example, I might say, "Son, this is what a real man does in this situation. What kind of man do you want to be?" In doing this, I'm setting a standard for him of how I define real manhood, and giving him a chance to step into it.

10. Refuse to give up.

I know you're tempted daily to give up. So am I. When things don't go the way we planned, when children continue to be hard-to-handle and disobey on a regular basis, when marriages are strained and unhealthy, when finances are tight, we might be tempted to say, "to heck with it all. I'm not even going to try anymore." But there's a promise of God that applies to these feelings, and friends, in this broken world that is becoming less and less friendly to Christians, we **MUST** choose to believe in the promises of God, acting like we know they will prove true. It's found in Galatians 6:9:

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

And another promise...

"For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Do not give up. The circumstances you're in today are not forever. We will reap a harvest at some point if we stay the course, even if happens on the other side of heaven. There's more waiting for us when we get there, and the choices we make today to press on and fight the good fight will make a difference in generations to come, influencing who among our family and friends get to join us with Jesus.

Do not give up.

So there you have it, friends. Ten ways to step out of the war and into the battle for your H2H boys. It was actually quite freeing to me to write this list for you. At the time God brought it to my mind, I was really struggling with my own H2H boys, and writing these steps reminded me of how hard I really am fighting for them every single day. Sometimes, progress is slow, but that doesn't mean God isn't working.

The key to surviving, even thriving as you raise an H2H boy, is to keep your eyes on Christ. Pursue Him more than you pursue being a good mom, because as you grow in Him, you'll automatically become one.

Serving Together,
Brooke McGlothlin

Brooke McGlothlin is co-founder and President of Raising Boys Ministries, author of *Praying for Boys: Asking God for the Things They Need Most*, and co-author of *Hope for the Weary Mom: Let God Meet You in the Mess*. She's a mother of two boys who believes God has chosen her to fight for the hearts of her sons. She can be found most often on her knees in prayer, not because she's so holy, but because God is. Not because she knows how to raise godly men, but because she believes so much in the God who loves them more than she does. To dig even deeper into the concept of raising godly men and fighting for them instead of against them, join her *Fight Like a Boymom* program.