



Prodigal Sons

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

When Gigi Graham Tchividjian, daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham, was pregnant with her second child she was in the Swiss Alps with her mother on Mother's Day. "I awoke early that Sunday morning to the sound of bells," she recalls. "It was one of those indescribable spring days that can only be experienced in the Alps." The "window boxes hanging from every window in the village... were a riot of color, almost gaudy in the extravagance—red and pink geraniums, yellow and orange marigolds, blue ageratum and petunias of every variety! A perfect setting for Mother's Day."

As a mother, I also look back to a perfect Mother's Day in completely different circumstances—not as a mother spending time with a grown daughter. Rather as a single mother with an adolescent son.

It was May in Michigan. As soon as we arrived home from church, Carlton and I quickly changed our clothes. After packing a picnic lunch, we drove—with dog in tow—to the nearly vacated sprawling campus of Grand Valley State University to hike along the ravines jutting out along the Grand River. Virginia blue bells and buttercups were in full bloom. Trillium and May flowers lined the winding path up to the pine forest. Then a lunch of sandwiches, chips, and fruit—not forgetting the dog treats.

For mothers who look forward to six-course dinners and floral arrangements, this offered little elegance. Nor did it have an old-world touch complete with "the tinkling of cowbells" and "glorious snow-covered peaks." But my memories have turned those hours into nothing short of a Swiss Alps experience—a perfect setting for Mother's Day.

But there have been many other days, including those designated to honor Mothers, where *painful* is a more accurate

adjective than *perfect*. Carlton was never outwardly rebellious. He didn't want to disappoint me. But there were years, one after another, when trouble was only a temptation away.

This was true of Ruth Graham's sons as well. She wrote of that pain and anguish in her memoir *Prodigals—and Those Who Love Them*. "As Franklin grew older, I'd get calls from the police," she remembered. But the problems were not just with her oldest son. Ned was the baby of the family. "He was a loving child," she recalled, "but he also went through a period where he was involved with drugs. Looking back on it, it seems like just a few weeks ago. But it dragged on for years."

She tells how she was lying awake one night worrying about Ned. Tossing and turning, she finally got out of bed and reached for her Bible. She opened it to Philippians 4.

The verse was familiar: "*In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*"

She knew the verse by heart, but there in that night hour she saw it in a different light. She was startled by two words that she had not previously noticed—with *thanksgiving*.

"Suddenly I realized the missing ingredient to my prayers had been *thanksgiving*. So I sat there and thanked God for all that Ned was and all he had meant to me through the years." Previously her prayer had been, "Lord, help me discipline this boy." Now she was thanking God for all his good qualities.

With thanksgiving. Two words. Tender mercies. She turned out the light and fell asleep.

When I read about Franklin and Ned Graham, Ruth's story became my own. I too tossed and turned during many sleepless nights. Her discovery of these two little words brought *tender mercies* to me at a time when I most needed them. □

—Ruth Tucker