

NAVIGATING NEW ROADS

Parenting teens but secretly
wondering if you're
holding the map upside down

© KAREN GAUVREAU | LIGHTLYFRAYED.COM



Ah, tricycle days.

Walking beside chubby feet pedaling to the next adventure.

Within arms reach.

When a hill arrives, my hand gently nudges the seat.

When a curb blocks the way, I lift the handles slightly.

Simple.

Slow.

Safe.

Which is not quite like parenting teenagers.

[ahem]

Parents of teens may more likely say:

Complicated.

Fast.

Risky.

As much as we savor the tricycle years, we know next steps are important.

So we try to loosen our grip.

We change the way we nudge up hills.

And we coach from a few steps away.

The tricycle has barely been put away.

Suddenly, my boy is learning to drive and
also strengthening my prayer life:

*Please Lord, don't let him face the guilt of
wrecking our minivan.*

Amen.

To prepare for his test, we learn
everything about road signs and hazards.
And this book is born.

Can you see me waving?

I am travelling

with my husband and four boys,
in the lane right beside you.

We are all learning as we go.

If you pull over at the next stop
we can sip coffee and swap stories.

We'll find common threads of sharp
curves and wide open roads.

My treat.





LET'S BE HONEST

Wouldn't it be easier to let our teenagers
sit in the driver seat,
if we were always right beside them,
holding the actual steering wheel?

#missingthetrike
#kiddingnotkidding

CHECK THE DASHBOARD

When my gas light blinks, I know I can still drive to church, stop for groceries and drop off library books before I *need* to fill up.

[if you tell my husband, we can't be friends]

I know I should conquer my list **after** filling up. The only thing I'd be missing is the chance to spend time at the side of the road flagging down strangers.

But I keep **pushing**, trying not to slow down.

Dashboard lights serve a purpose. We know we shouldn't ignore them, but we don't always listen.

We try to squeeze out one more task. Cross one more thing off the list.

The best way to care for teenagers? Make sure you are not **running on empty**.

How can you fill up today? Ask [someone](#) to hold you accountable to get your levels in order, to prepare for this important leg of the journey.



CONSTRUCTION AHEAD

There is never a convenient time to be in the midst of road repairs.

Even though it's necessary, we groan that it takes so long. Painful speeds. Sudden braking. Stops and starts.

Forming character and healthy habits in our families resembles this tedious construction zone.

Patience [*the jack hammer whirs*]

Perspective [*metal clangs*]

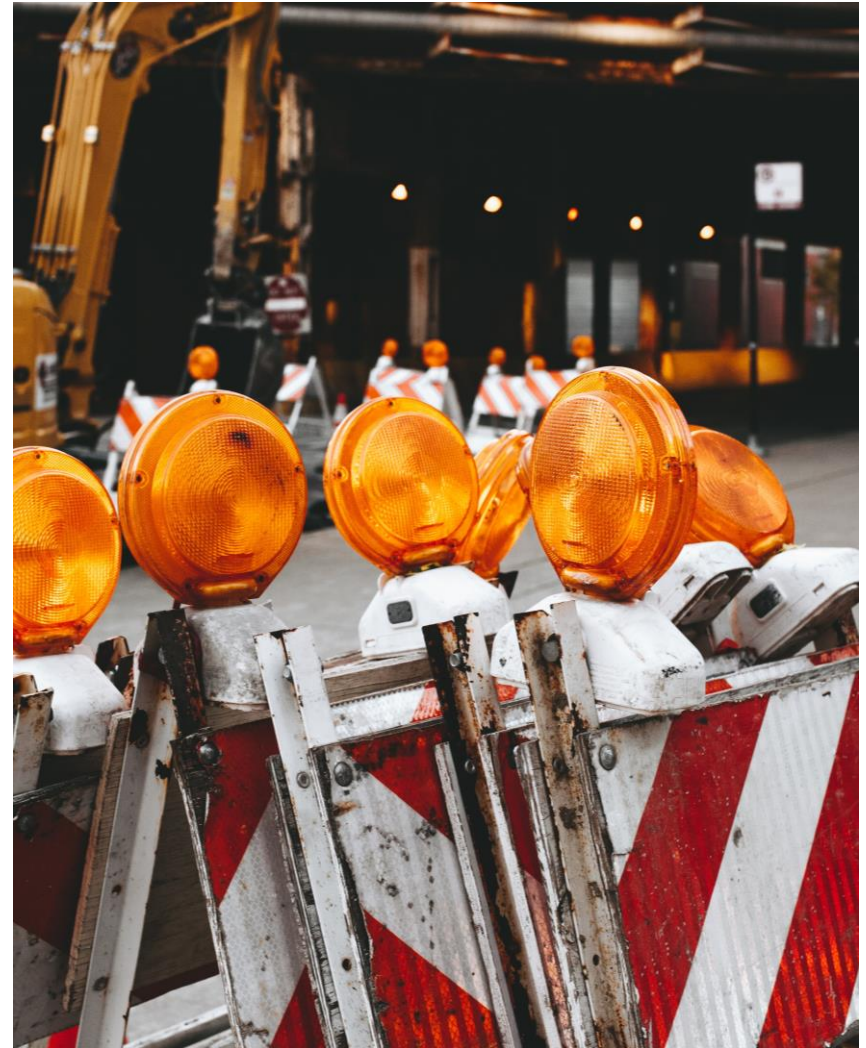
Self-control [*trucks reverse*]

Frustration mounts when we deal with the same issues on repeat. Theirs and ours.

But the final results? So worth the struggle.

We may even forget the effort it took to get there.

New projects will need attention, but first celebrate a patch of beautifully paved road.





Many teens believe “stop” must be a parent’s favorite sign. Because we often need to answer *no, not yet or not ever*.

Is there any more important sign for our safety?

No (*oops – there’s that word again*).

But beyond being restrictive, stop signs represent wisdom.

Cease movement.

I need to calm down before we can discuss this further.

Look both ways.

I’m pausing to consider my answer.

Stopping is necessary.

Stopping protects our teenagers and our relationship.

Because flying through an intersection, or conversation, without a brief stop can lead to regret.

In fact, I’m considering a marketing campaign to bring back the beauty of ‘Stop.’ With pom poms I will cheer, “Gooooooooooooo Stop!”

Which is not even a bit confusing.

“Mom. You still treat me like I’m a kid and I can’t stand it.”

Hard truth to hear.

My arguments form, and my tongue prepares for a rebuttal.

But if I can yield, and consider my teenager’s perspective first, we may be able to avoid a collision.

Yielding can be...

Thanks for being honest. That must have been hard to say.

Help me understand what that looks like for you.

I will try to do better. Please be patient while I learn a new way.

Yielding is also...

I’m not sure I see it the same way. Can I share my point of view once you’re finished?

Make room.

Defer.

Listen.

Inhale proudly when you follow the yield sign.

But don’t worry. If you misstep, there will be other opportunities.

Probably even tomorrow.

A TIME TO YIELD





How do you drive over speed bumps?

Slowly.

With fear and white knuckles?

Goodness, no.

After the bump, you know you will return to level ground.

Parenting teens is filled with speed bumps (in our home, we call them 'blips').

Grumbling.

Moodiness.

Off days.

Remembering these will pass allows you to handle them calmly and without panic.

Be mindful of this sign.

Slow down.

Level ground will soon return.

Years ago, our 5-year-old launched a dog walking business. With wobbly crayon letters, he printed:

*If we are here, come in and I will walk your dog. If we are not here, **go away**.*

As parents, 'Go away' can really sting. Your teen may make it abundantly clear they do not want you to enter. Perhaps they no longer want you in their room. Or you need to be invited in first. Or they pull away and you wonder what is going on in their lives.

How can you help them navigate life when you are not allowed in?

Respect their **boundaries**. Teens need to begin to pull away. It is actually their job. It may feel hurtful, but it is necessary for healthy development.

And the more we force our way into their lives, the more they resist.

But stay available.

And pray for wisdom to know how to lean in sensitively.

When you least expect it, your teen will raise an Enter sign and you will be ready.

NO ENTRY ALLOWED



CAUTION: ICY ROAD AHEAD

Without warning, teenagers can hit icy patches and wipe out. They live in a frosty, harsh world, with many pressures pushing them to lose balance and crash.

Prepare together, so you are not caught off-guard.

Warn of black ice – the danger that is hidden until it does damage. Reassure them you will always be available to help them reset and regroup. To find their bearings.

It is futile to yell at the ice since we can not control their environment. But we can train them to spot hazards.

Be alert to your teen's mood when you connect. The cues may be obvious or require discernment.

Do they seem bruised or beaten?

Reach a hand down and lift them back to steady ground. Assure them they can process the fall in a productive way and learn from their wounds.

They may even warn the next in line of hazards.





COURSE CORRECTIONS

What do we do when we realize we've made a wrong turn ?

We have been too protective. Or too lenient.

We have let things slide.

Or overreacted.

Hope says it is never too late.

We can always make course corrections.

Turn the wheel a little, and revisit a small area of parenting.

Or crank the wheel hard and reinstate important boundaries.

Give yourself permission to be human.

To change and grow and reset the GPS accordingly.

It is never too late.

Although there may be pushback because new directions can feel uncomfortable.

Admit that you were veering off-course, even slightly.

Have a tough conversation and apologize for any confusion a change may bring.

Own your new perspective and steer purposefully.

**There is a time
to reflect on mistakes
we have made.
But *focusing* on
the rear view mirror
can make us miss
our right now life.
Or hit a deer.**

Karen Gauvreau



At the end of a tough parenting day,
you may find me
in an unexpected place.
Sitting outside my teenagers'
bedroom while they sleep.

This began years ago during a chaotic
season of my short fuse and immense
guilt.

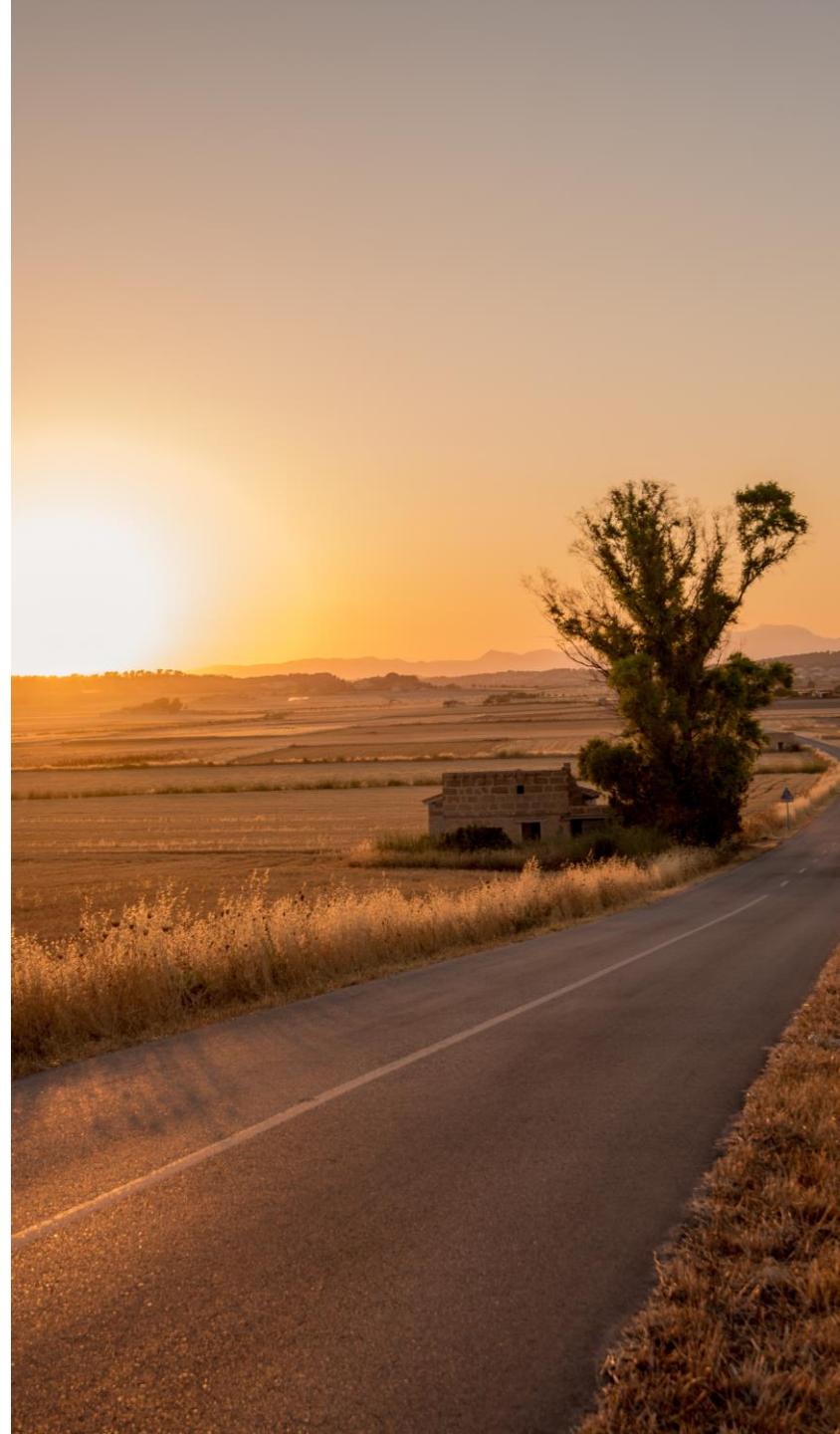
It is the place I go, to forgive myself.
I reflect on the day and the apologies.
Or plan the apology not yet spoken.
I pray for peace and the wisdom to
move forward.

When I stand up, I ask God to help
me not to dwell on the
rearview mirror.



**...I remember
what day it is.
It is today.
Not yesterday.**

Rachel Macy Stafford



TRUST THE LOW BEAMS



Fog can invade every parenting journey.

Suddenly the next move feels tentative and unclear.

White-knuckling the steering wheel and desperately trying to regain control usually backfires.

In our early years together, my husband had a health scare and we anxiously awaited test results.

Driving home from the hospital, I entered fog and could only see the patch of road right in front of me.

Panicking, I did something I knew not to do.

I threw on my high beams.

The light reflected back on the fog droplets and I could no longer see the road – at all.

God whispered:

Trust me. Really trust me.

I know you can't see what's next, but I promise I'm here.

You don't need to use your high beams.

As parents, cling to this truth:

God cares for your teens even more than you do.

You can trust Him even when fog closes in.

Low beams. Prayer. And trust.



OPEN ROAD? YES, PLEASE

Blue skies and level ground.

Without an obstacle in sight.

After slippery bits, speed bumps and construction, this is the time to roll down the windows and relax.

Inhale an optimistic breath.

Celebrate smooth travelling and don't waste a minute dreading the next curve.

Glance over at your teenager often.

Steal glimpses of who they are becoming - the beauty of their present selves.

Maybe even hug them if you're feeling really brave.





NOW WHAT?

Phew.

We have covered a lot of ground together.

Tending to our dashboards.

Using our mirrors wisely.

And navigating road signs.

This book is almost finished, but more road awaits.

I would love to stay in touch.

To learn about your family, and how I can support you.

Simply send an update on your current adventure to:

karen@lightlyfrayed.com

I treasure each email and promise to respond as soon as I fill up with gas....