

Sissy Goff MED, LPC-MHSP

BRAVER
STRONGER
SMARTER



*A GIRL'S GUIDE to
OVERCOMING
WORRY & ANXIETY*

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19 20 21 22 23 24 25 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



 **For Henry.** 

The bravest and most loved little guy I know.

A Note to Parents and Caregivers-

Thank you for picking up this book. I truly believe it can make a difference in the life of the girl you love. A few things I'd love for you to keep in mind:

1. This book has been written primarily for girls in elementary school (although I think girls of any age could actually benefit). Because those years span a lot of reading levels, I believe it is best to read it out loud with her. That way, if a concept is complicated or she's having trouble understanding, you can clarify in a way that you know she'd better understand.
2. Let her lead the way. Have her read to you, rather than vice versa. Let her answer questions and do the activities first. Don't do the work for her. It will mean much more to her when she feels pride in her own sense of courage and accomplishment.
3. Go slowly. There is a lot of information for a young brave, strong, smart heart and brain to take in. It may be that you only read a page or two a day. That's okay. There's not a schedule for beating her worries.
4. Connect over her courage more than her worries. Listen to her, but whatever we give the most attention to is what's reinforced. So pay more attention to the bravery she shows than the worry she describes.
5. Be aware of your own Worry Monster (you and your girl will learn about him throughout the book). In fact, your own Worry Monster awareness might need to be point number one. Worries are a little like the stomach flu—they're often family affairs. It will be much easier for her to fight her worries if you're fighting yours too. In fact, I'd love for you to grab a copy of *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, my book for grown-ups that mirrors the content in this book, but dives much deeper not only in information, but in practical help for her and for how you can best help.
6. In fact, I'd love for you to grab a copy of *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, my book for grown-ups that mirrors the content of this book. It dives much deeper, sharing information, practical help for her, and other ways you can best help her.

I truly believe that this book can change things for her . . . and for you. I believe it will lead to sweet, rich conversation between the two of you. I believe it will help grow her confidence in who God has truly made her to be. And I have a feeling it might help you find a little more of who He's made you to be too. Whether you're her mom, dad, aunt, grandmother, or teacher, or whatever important role you have in her life, God gave you to each other on purpose. And your time and confidence in her during this process will be some of the most important tools she's got!

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Foreword

Hey, guys. My name is Alena. I will never forget the first time I met Sissy. It was for a counseling session, and I had just lost my mom a couple of weeks before. Worry, grief, and pain were hitting me big-time, somehow all mixed into one big emotion. I felt small and my “problems” felt insurmountable. (I say “problems” with quotation marks, because one thing Sissy has taught me is that our problems are actually just what make us human. They’re totally natural and nothing to be afraid of.)

Sitting in Sissy’s comfy office and talking to her that first time was so peaceful. It put my loud and worried mind at rest. It felt more like a conversation with a wise friend than counseling. That’s really the only way I can describe it. Her kind eyes gave me reassurance. By looking at Sissy and talking to her, I knew I would be okay. Before meeting her, I was in no way looking forward to counseling or happy about going. But the moment I met Sissy, I knew it was good for me. Sitting in her office was the first time I learned about the “Worry Monster,” as she calls it. It sounded scary and uncontrollable. But despite all my fear, Sissy continued to empower me and remind me of who is in control: me and God.

Sissy has a way of making our problems, especially worry, look small compared to the power we have over them. The wisdom, techniques, and tips I have received from Sissy have been absolutely life changing. And I think Sissy will really help you too.

—Alena Pitts, age 15

Hi!

My name is Sissy. I have the honor of spending time every day with girls like you. Girls who are smart. Brave. Strong. Kind. Has anyone told you lately that you're all of those things? Well, you are. And I know this even though we haven't met in person yet. I'll tell you how soon.

One of the first things to know about me is that I have a very brave dog named Lucy. She's also very small. In fact, she weighs eight pounds, which is about the same as a bag of potatoes your mom might buy at the grocery store. Don't tell that to Lucy, though. She thinks she's as big as a German shepherd. One time she actually bit the nose of a dog that big. I think he thought Lucy was a fly or something.

Lucy has a lot of courage. That is, until she doesn't. Let me tell you a story about Lucy's courage—and her fear.

I take Lucy to work with me every day. She helps me talk to and listen to the girls who come to the place where I work, Daystar Counseling Ministries. It's a yellow house with a white picket fence where lots of kids come who feel sad or angry or afraid. One boy called it the little yellow house that helps people. It's a pretty great place to work. For me and for Lucy.

Because we work there and learn lots of things from girls like you, I also get to meet with girls and parents all over the country. Sometimes Lucy travels with me. The first time she ever did, we went to talk to a group of fourth-grade girls at a school. She had never been in front of a large group before. You know how that feels—a little scary. But Lucy decided to be her bravest self that day. She let lots of girls pet her and give



her hugs. She even waved at them, which is her very best trick. And when we walked out of the school building, Lucy threw up everywhere.

You see, Lucy is brave, but she also is afraid sometimes. She worries. She worries about big dogs, and she evidently worries about being in front of big crowds. She also worries about things that might not make a lot of sense to some people. The thing she worries about more than anything else is . . . hiccups. Yes, hiccups. If anyone hiccups around Lucy, it scares her. And when she is worrying about hiccups, there is nothing I can do to make her feel better.

Like there is for Lucy, there might be something that feels scary to you. Maybe you worry about something bad happening to your mom or dad. Maybe someone you care about died, and now you worry it will happen to someone else you love. Or maybe you got sick one time and threw up, and now you worry so much that you might throw up again that your tummy actually hurts. Maybe you worry about bugs or monsters or storms. Anything real or imaginary can make us worry like Lucy worries about hiccups.

I talk to girls every day who feel these kinds of things. They worry and worry and can't get it out of their heads. I have the best job in the world, though, because I get to help. Lucy does too. And now we'd like to help you.

Oh, I almost forgot. I told you I'd tell you how I know that you're brave and smart and strong and kind. For one thing, it's because you're reading this book, which is really cool and smart of you. And another reason—the most important one—is because God made you. And He made you on purpose. He made you knowing that you have kindness and bravery and strength and all kinds of things inside of you that no one ever has had and no one ever will have in the same way again.

God has all kinds of amazing things in store for your life, things better than you could ever imagine that can only be done by you!

So keep reading, and Lucy and I will help you not worry so much about the worries. We'll help you be free to be the YOU that God wonderfully made you to be!

Rules for Reading This Book!

I'm not sure how you feel about rules, but because you're a bit of a worrier like Lucy and me, I have a feeling you might like rules. I sure do. Rules can make you feel more comfortable by letting you know what to expect. So here they are.

- 1. Go Slow.** Don't read this book too fast. When you learn something new, tell your mom or dad or grandmother or the big person reading it with you what you're learning. Practice it until you feel really good and comfortable, and then move on to the next chapter. The more you work through each idea, the better you'll learn and the stronger you'll get in your fight against worry!
- 2. Don't Give Up.** This book has a lot of really fun things to do and think about. Beating your worry may take a little longer than you want. You're going to get distracted. You might feel like it's taking too long. But don't quit. You can do this. And we're going to build in some good reasons and rewards for you when you stick with it!
- 3. Have fun!** Well, of course, we're going to make this fun along the way. We'll have places in the book to draw and games to play and things that really will help. Plus, you will end this book feeling braver and stronger and smarter than ever before. And that's fun, no matter what!

SECTION ONE

UNDERSTANDING

1. What Is Worry?

Is it hard to raise your hand in class sometimes because you think you will say something silly?

Is it hard to put down your pencil when your teacher tells you to because you feel like you need to finish one more problem or check everything one more time to make sure you got it right?

Does your tummy ever hurt on the way to school?

Is it ever hard to fall asleep because you keep wondering who you'll talk to at a birthday party the next day? Or who you'll sit by on the school bus for a field trip?

Do you lie in bed wondering if your parents have fallen asleep, or what a certain noise or shadow is? Or do you have trouble falling asleep because you can't stop thinking about how long it's taking you to fall asleep?

Do you get frustrated at your little sister or brother or friends when they come in your room and gets things out of order? Do you then have a hard time getting un-frustrated?

Do you ever decide you would rather not try something if it's going to be scary?

Do you find yourself thinking something bad will happen to your mom or dad, and then you can't get the idea out of your head?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you worry sometimes.

Guess what? We all do. Everyone also feels sad and happy and angry and afraid sometimes.

What is one thing that made you happy lately?

What is one thing that made you sad?

What is one thing you felt angry about?

What is one thing you're afraid of?

What is one thing you're worried about these days?

It can be hard to understand the difference between feeling afraid and feeling worried. Let's talk about what these words mean, because they'll be important in the fight against your worry.

Fear or feeling afraid is something we all feel. Let's take Lucy, for example. Lucy is afraid of loud noises. If a door slams loudly right next to her, she runs away as fast as she can. But, then, she gets over it. She stops shaking or running after the noise stops.



Can you think of some things people might be afraid of? Some people are afraid of bugs or the dark. Some are afraid of roller coasters. I'm sure you have a few things you're afraid of too. We all do. I'm afraid of jellyfish in the ocean. I knew a girl one time who was afraid of cotton balls, which was kind of silly. We'll talk more about silly fears later. But, mostly, we're afraid of things that we believe can hurt us. And, thankfully, God made us that way. Those fears keep us safe. We'll talk more about that later too.

Fears are different than worries. For Lucy, hiccups might be what she worries about the most. The first time someone hiccupped around her, I was meeting with a mom in my office. We were talking about her daughter and some friend troubles the girl was having at school. All of a sudden I got the hiccups. Lucy looked at me like something was terribly wrong. And then she tried to climb on top of the woman's head. The woman looked at Lucy like something was wrong with her! And maybe with me too. After my hiccups were over, Lucy still shook and didn't want to get near me for almost an hour. Her fear didn't go away just because the hiccups did. Her fear became a worry. And now anytime someone burps around her or makes a noise like a hiccup, Lucy worries the hiccups are on their way. Worry is fear that hangs around and won't go away. Here are some examples:

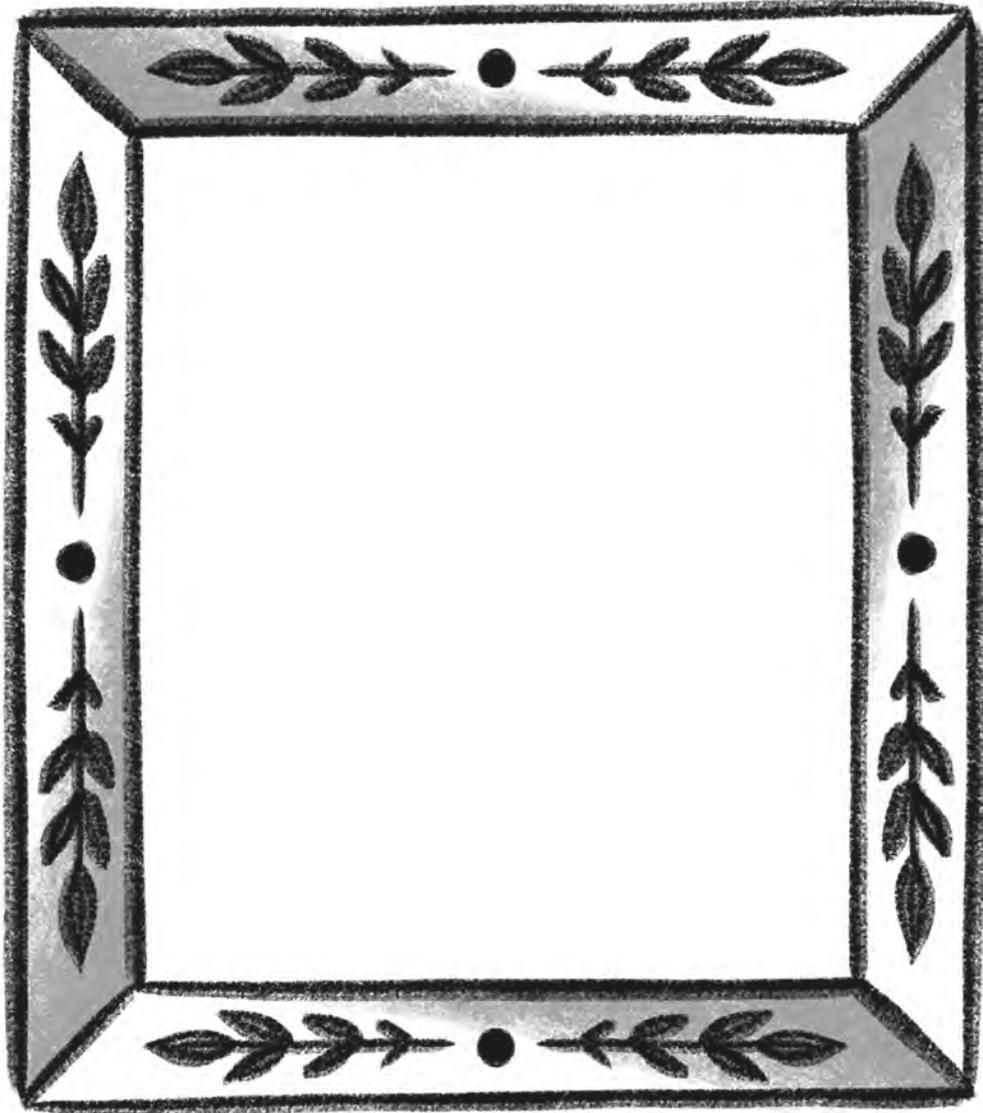
Maybe I'll have to go first to give my speech at school today. . . .

Maybe I won't make a good grade on my test. . . .

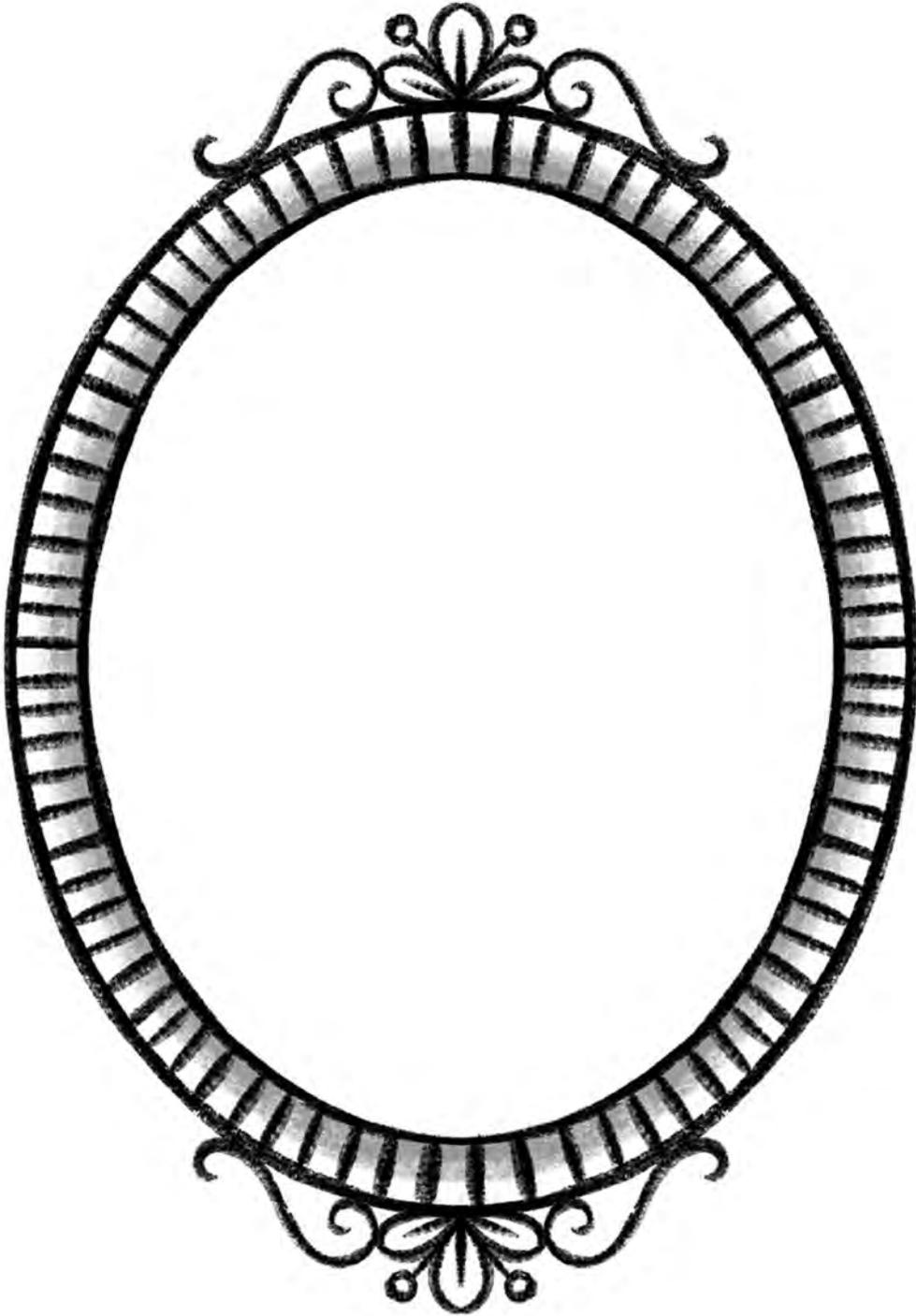
Maybe I won't have anyone to play with at recess. . . .

I'm worried I'll throw up again, like I did last time my tummy hurt. . . .

Draw a picture here of some things you're afraid of.



Draw a picture here of some of the things you worry about.



We all worry sometimes. It's a normal part of life. It does NOT mean anything is wrong with you. The problem with worry is not that it happens. The problem is that worry doesn't really help us. In fact, it even hurts us sometimes. That's what this book is about.

If you worry a lot and don't know how to make it stop, this book is for you. If you have tummy aches or headaches and you don't know why, this book is for you. If you get angry when things don't go the way you expected, this book is for you. If you have worries that keep you from doing things you really want to do, you have the right book. If you have a fear that pops in your head and you can't seem to get it out, this book is for YOU!

I talk to girls every day in my office who don't want to worry anymore. They have worries that go over and over and over in their minds. It's like a small roller coaster that goes around and around on the same track. A thought pops in their head, like *What if something bad happens to my mom or dad?* And then the thought gets stuck. It loops around and around and around. They get frustrated at the thought and then frustrated at themselves because they can't get rid of it. Sometimes it makes them sad. Sometimes they feel like they're the only person who has those kinds of worries. They're not. I know so many girls who have one-loop worry roller coasters in their minds over all kinds of different things. You're not alone.

Some girls don't really know that worry is what is bothering them. They think more about how their tummy hurts than their worries. But worries cause tummy aches. And headaches too. Lots of other things happen in your body that we're going to talk about.

I talk to girls whose worry is more about getting things wrong. They don't want to mess up. They want to make good grades. They want everyone to like them and think they're nice. They want their parents and grandparents and teachers to be proud of them all the time. These girls feel more pressure than they do worry. And their worry is such a normal part of life that it feels like who they are.

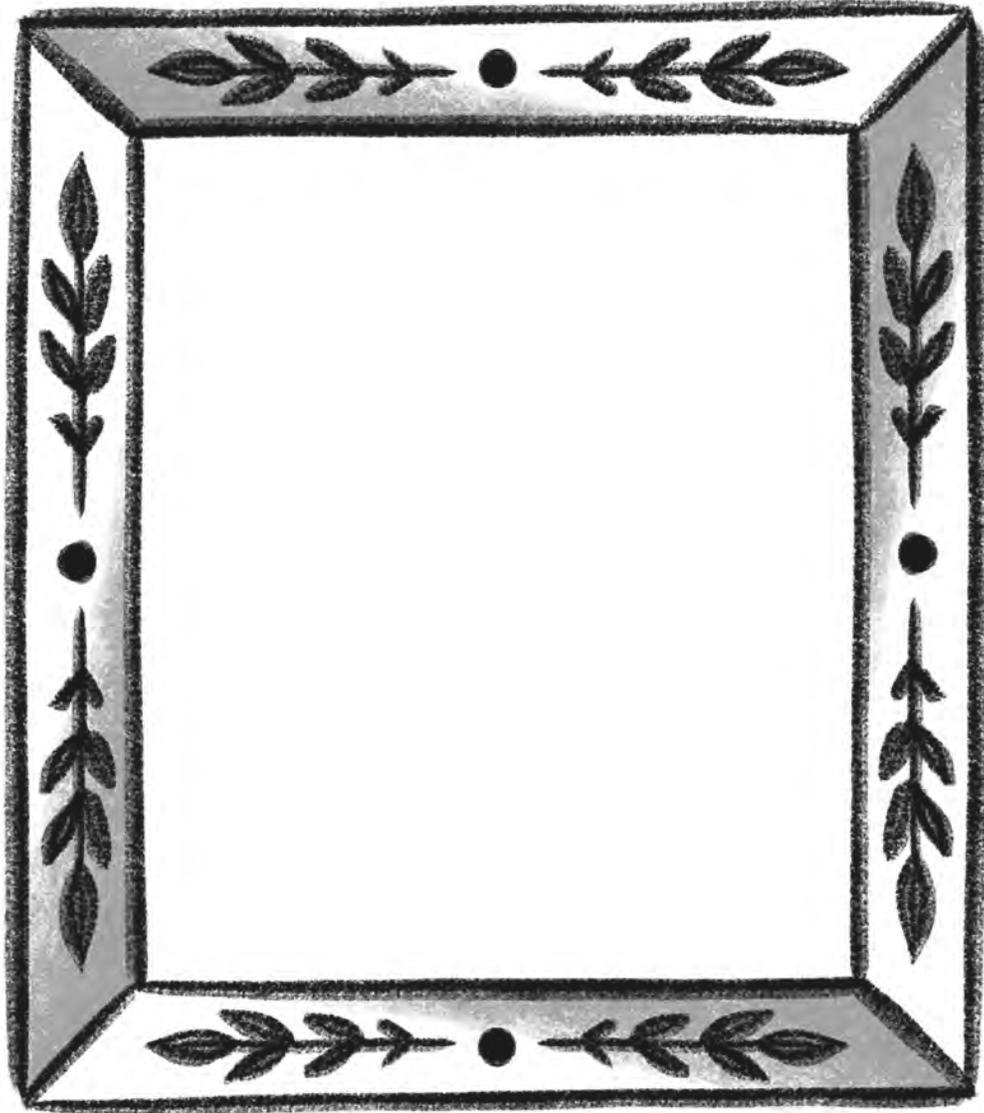
Worries come in all shapes and sizes. There are big worries and little worries. There are worries you grow out of and worries that feel like they'll never go away. Worry does get worse if you don't fight it. Maybe the most important thing you NEED TO KNOW about worry is that it always tries to make you feel like a problem is bigger than you are. And the more you worry, the bigger the problem gets and the smaller you feel in your ability to fight it.

No matter what size your worry is, you can fight it. Throughout this book there are going to be LOTS of tools to help. In fact, the first tool we're going to come up with is a name for your worry.

What would you like to call your worry? Lots of girls I know call it the Worry Monster. Some girls call it Mr. Perfect, because it tries to tell them they have to make

everything perfect. Another name is the Worry Bug, because, well, it bugs them. One girl just wanted to name her worry Bob. You can call your worries anything you want. But we want to give him a name so that he's easier to fight!

Draw a picture of your Worry Monster here and write his name below.



Because we haven't met yet, you can't tell me the name of your worry. So, for now, I'll just call him Worry Monster. But as you think about him and as you work on fighting him, it's important that you use the name you gave him. You know him. And you're going to know better than anyone else how to beat him!

In this book, we're going to learn about your Worry Monster and how he tries to trick you. He's pretty smart and tries a lot of different ways to get you thinking more about your worry than your courage. But you are SMARTER than he is. And you have lots more courage. You can beat him. I'm going to help. Lucy is too.

Now, just in case you don't think you worry very much, this book is still for you. The thing about life and school and friends and family is that you're going to have troubles at some point along the way. It's in the Bible, and it's a verse we're going to talk about more in this book.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!

I have overcome the world.—John 16:33

If you don't have trouble right now, you will at some point. You're going to get your feelings hurt or feel left out sometimes. You're not going to get the grade you want. Your mom or dad or teacher might get mad at you. When those things happen, you will likely worry.

Even if you don't worry now, this book will build up your worry-fighting muscles. It's kind of like if you decide to run a long race. You might do jumping jacks to build up strength before it. The race doesn't really have to do with jumping jacks, other than they build your muscles so you'll be ready to run as fast as you can. This book will build your Worry Monster-fighting muscles in the same way.

Here's the thing. Do you remember the name of this book? It's not called *How to Build Your Worry Monster-Fighting Muscles*, although you'll learn how to do that. It's not called *Everyone Worries*, although that's true too. It's called *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*. Because that's the most important thing I want you to remember. This book isn't going to make you braver, stronger, and smarter. You already are those things. It's why you can fight the Worry Monster. You are bigger and braver and stronger and smarter than he is. And I'm so proud of you for deciding



you're going to fight him. We're going to do it together. Throughout the chapters we'll have lots of muscle-building exercises.

Here's the first exercise: Ask your mom or dad, or your grandparent or a grown-up who loves you, to tell you about five times they've seen you be brave, strong, and smart, and list those below.

How I've been brave:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How I've been strong:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How I've been smart:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now I want you to tell that same grown-up three things you've learned in this chapter.

In fact, you're going to do that at the end of every chapter. You're the expert here on what it means to be brave. And strong. And smart. That means you know better than anyone else how to beat your Worry Monster. The grown-ups who love you want to help, but they'll need your help to know how. What are three things you can teach them that you learned in this chapter?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.