

The Joy of Pursuing

CREATE 

Creativity in the

ANYWAY 

Margins of Motherhood

Ashlee Zadd

“If you’ve ever felt like your creative energy and your motherhood were at odds, *Create Anyway* will be a balm to your soul. Ashlee’s personal experiences and thoughtful insight, paired with creative exercises and journaling prompts, are sure to remind your heart that creating in the margins is worth the effort it takes!”

—Ruth Chou Simons, mom to six boys, *Wall Street Journal*
bestselling author, and founder of gracelaced.com

“*Create Anyway* is an anthem, an invitation, a spark that will light a fire in your heart. As a mom to three littles with a busy schedule and a list of excuses as to why this season isn’t suited for making art, I needed this permission slip to pick up my pen and do exactly what Ashlee encourages mothers to do—create anyway.”

—Gretchen Saffles, founder of Well-Watered Women and
bestselling author of *The Well-Watered Woman*

“This book is a love letter. A love letter that will be bookmarked, dog-eared, highlighted, and scribbled in for years to come—throughout all the messy and gritty states of motherhood. As a mom of an emerging two-year-old, I didn’t realize (but God knew) how much I needed to read these words. Every page, story, and anecdote spoke to me. If you’re looking for a manual to help you reclaim the sacred slowness of motherhood and creativity, pick this one up today. You will find yourself breathing easier after just the first chapter.”

—Hannah Brencher, author of
Fighting Forward and *Come Matter Here*

“As a long-time friend of Ashlee Gadd, I can tell you she lives out the words on these pages. The stories and wisdom in *Create Anyway* will inspire you to prioritize and delight in making art, not in spite of motherhood, but because of it. She’s the cheerleader we all need.”

—Laura Wifler, author, podcaster,
and cofounder of Risen Motherhood

“I cried tears of release throughout this book. It’s dreamy and gorgeous and raw, and I feel as if I can finally exhale after two long, hard years.

Thank you, Ashlee, for reminding me that I have permission to create just as God intended.”

—Leslie Means, creator of *Her View From Home*

“I dare you not to be refreshed after reading this. Part pep talk, part permission slip, this beautiful book honors both the mothering journey *and* our God-given desires to create. Ashlee’s honest reflections will leave you encouraged and affirmed. I’ll be placing *Create Anyway* in the hands of women for years to come.”

—Kayla Craig, author of *To Light Their Way*
and creator of *Liturgies for Parents*

“With wit, wisdom, and a wealth of grace, Ashlee Gadd woos us to believe that motherhood and creativity do not detract from each other. Indeed, they deepen each other. *Create Anyway* is a compassionate call to be enchanted by the ordinary and see the beauty right where you belong. Ashlee’s stories are a sacred invitation, welcoming all of us—in spite of all that feels hard and hopeless—to create anyway.”

—Rachel Marie Kang, founder of The Fallow House
and author of *Let There Be Art*

“Imagine one giant exhale, taking a refreshing shower, and drinking a cold glass of water. This is what reading *Create Anyway* feels like. If you’ve ever questioned your value or worth in the long season of mothering little ones, I highly recommend this book! It feels like letting go and coming home at the same time.”

—Anjuli Paschall, author of *Stay and Awake*

“*Create Anyway* is a glimpse into where the good stuff is made—under the piles of laundry, runny noses, and lists that never seem to end. Sharing her own relatable stories, Ashlee drops breadcrumbs of hope, confirming that we are not alone in the messy margins and perhaps instead of waiting for ‘perfect’ we have permission to lean in and make something beautiful right there.”

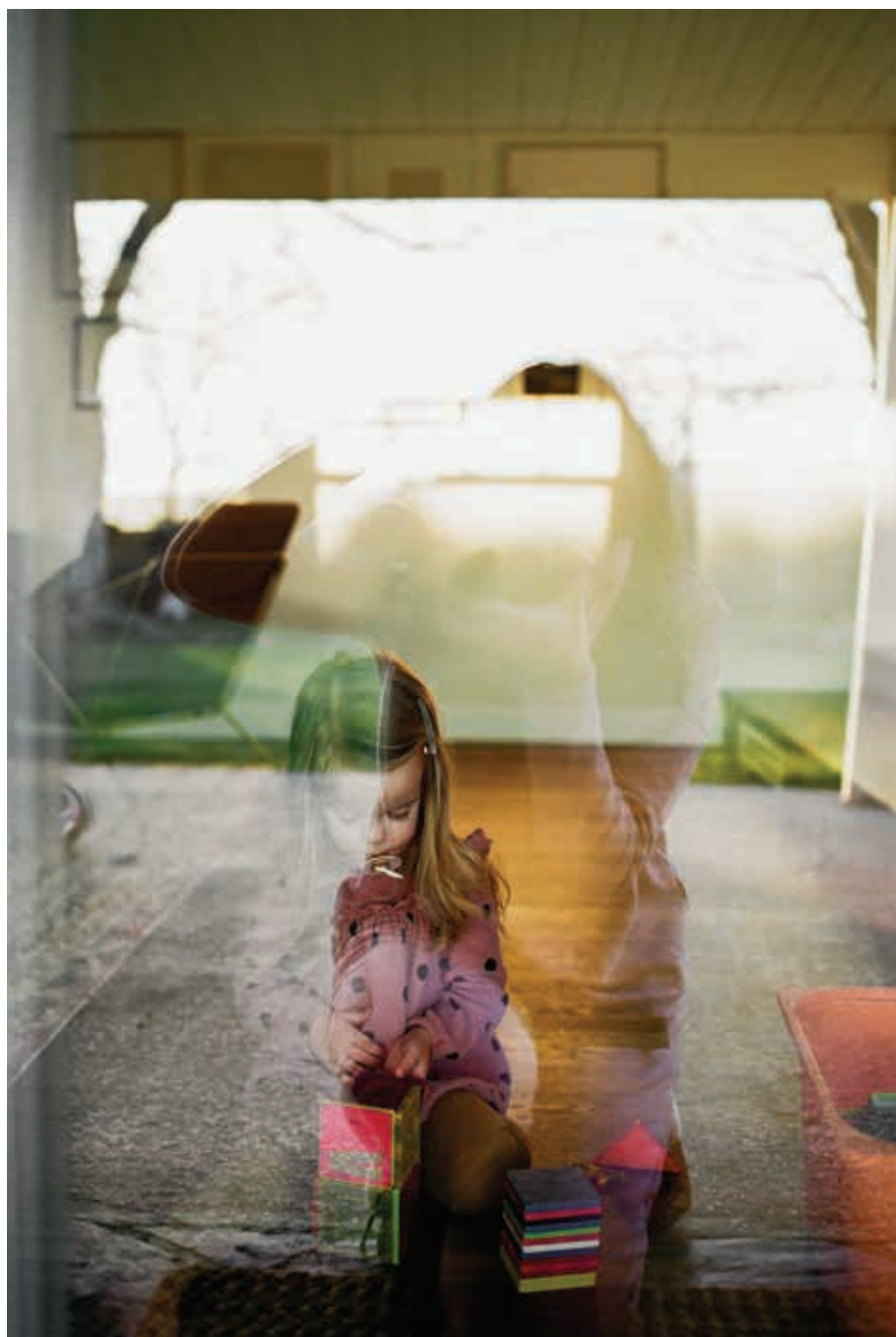
—Jena Holliday, artist, author, and founder of Spoonful of Faith

CREATE ANYWAY

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CREATE ANYWAY

The Joy of Pursuing Creativity in the
Margins of Motherhood

ASHLEE GADD



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*for Everett, Carson, and Presley—
I loved writing this book, but I love being your mom more.*

*and for Katie—
who's had every reason to give up,
but keeps creating anyway.*

Mothers shape love and macaroni and
sleeplessness and soap into young men
and women over the course of many years;
is there a greater art, or a more powerful
patient creativity, than *that*?

—Brian Doyle

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A NOTE ABOUT THE PHOTOS IN THIS BOOK

The year I wrote this book, I learned how to shoot film. I started at the beginning with Google and YouTube and a used camera I bought off Ebay. I kid you not: it took me thirty minutes to figure out how to load film in the camera.

Unlike digital photography—which is quick and efficient—film is both painfully slow and wildly obscure. You cannot course correct if your settings are wrong, because you don't actually *know* your settings are wrong until you get the pictures back.

At the same time, film offers wonder and mystery, enchantment and grit. Film beckons me to slow down, wait for the light, wait for the moment. Wait, wait, wait. Film is teaching me the beauty of delayed gratification, a long-lost virtue in our instant-everything world.

Every photo I took for this book is one I shot on film. These images represent a humble beginning, a willingness to fail, and plenty of mistakes made. Even now I am tempted to be critical, to assure you I could have taken superior photos with a digital camera. But I suppose that's the whole point. Film, like all of creativity, requires surrender, releasing our work into the world knowing it is not perfect, and perhaps even, the extra grain is what makes it special.

These images represent my own curiosity and the courage to try something new. Which, come to think of it, is exactly what this book is about.

INTRODUCTION

My daughter Presley is playing in the bathtub, content with a plastic dinosaur and a Hot Wheels car, which, apparently, suffice as “bath toys” by third child standards.

I am sitting on a small plastic stool next to her, hunched over a stack of multicolored index cards, jotting down every parallel between motherhood and creativity I can think of: fear, comparison, imposter syndrome, sacrifice.

Presley flashes me a mischievous smile, holding a small purple Stegosaurus above her head. She babbles something incoherent before dropping it in the water—*plunk!*—flinging droplets on my cards. In case this isn’t obvious, I did not write this book in a cabin in the woods.

As a little girl, that’s how I thought books were written—in complete and utter solitude, at a charming wooden desk in a rustic cabin, next to a fireplace while snow fell silently outside the window. Even as a teenager, if you had asked me to describe a working author, I would have conjured up a romantic scene, something picturesque, poetic, the stuff you see in movies.

In reality, I started writing this book on the bathroom floor. No desk, no cabin, no fireplace, no silence. Just me, sitting next to the tub, while my daughter splashed water on my freshly inked ideas.

I wrote this book in tiny chunks throughout my days. Sometimes inspiration struck while I stood at the kitchen counter making peanut

butter and jelly sandwiches. Sentences often swirled in my head while I vacuumed Cheerios out of the carpet. I scribbled words in a tattered notebook in between breastfeeding, changing diapers, and managing distance learning for two kids in the middle of a global pandemic. Every morning, before touching my inbox or scrambling eggs, I wrote in the dark next to a burning candle before my children woke up.

And, I'll be honest, there were times I desperately wished for a cabin in the woods (for writing, yes, but also for sleeping and showering and watching Netflix and eating without a grabby toddler asking for “Mo? Mo?” bites of my food).

Then again, I don't know how I would possibly write a book about pursuing creativity in the margins, without, you know, *actually writing it in the margins*.

I used to believe motherhood and creativity were opposing forces—that my mothering was in the way of my creative work, and my creative work was in the way of my mothering.

But over the past nine years, as I've brought three babies into the world while simultaneously pursuing a number of creative endeavors, I've realized motherhood *inspires* creativity, and likewise, creativity inspires motherhood. The more I lean into both of these roles, the more I see how much they sustain each other. Both motherhood and

Both motherhood and creativity have taught me to be brave, to relentlessly seek beauty and joy among the mundane, to notice the remarkable grace flooding my unremarkable life.

creativity have taught me to be brave, to relentlessly seek beauty and joy among the mundane, to notice the remarkable grace flooding my unremarkable life.

This balancing act is not always easy or effortless. On the contrary, creating while mothering requires intention, patience, discipline, and faith. I've been tempted to give up more than once, but something inside me—a force that could only be from God Himself—propels me to keep going. To write a sentence down before I crawl into bed. To grab my camera anytime light flickers on the floor. To color and bake and arrange flowers in a jar, to do whatever it takes to keep making beautiful things in a broken world.

People often say you should write the book you want to read, and that's what I've attempted to do here. This is the book I wanted to read nine years ago, when I first became a mother and wondered if I could still pursue my creative dreams. This is the book I wanted to read seven years ago, when a little idea I had in the shower exploded in the most unexpected way. This is the book I wanted to read two weeks ago, when I wondered, for the billionth time, if any of my art mattered.

You'll notice I use the terms *creativity*, *creative work*, and *making art* somewhat interchangeably throughout this book. I feel it is important to disclose that at this point in my life, creativity is part of my actual job and something I get paid to do. Having said that, even now, I engage in plenty of creative acts I do not get paid for: taking pictures of my children, tending to plants in the yard, decorating my home, writing for my personal blog, hosting parties, putting together an outfit, styling bookshelves, trying new recipes, making gifts, etc. When I speak of creativity in this book, I am speaking broadly and generally of *any* creative act, whether paid or unpaid, seen or unseen, the kind of creativity that receives public accolades or the kind that simply brings a smile to your face in the privacy of your home. One

is not superior to the other. If anything, I hope to convince you in the following pages that creativity is essential to our human flourishing, and therefore worth pursuing whether or not you receive payment or applause as a result.

A few months ago, standing in the Target parking lot at the end of a terrible day, I looked up and saw a bright electric-orange cloud in the sky, perfectly positioned above my car.

I cannot explain the science behind why the cloud appeared so unbelievably orange. It probably had something to do with the location of the sun, combined with the smoky haze rising from wildfires raging nearby. What I *can* tell you is this: I couldn't take my eyes off that cloud. It felt as if God had planted it there just for me, beckoning my attention. As if to say, *Hey daughter, look up! I'm with you right now. I see you right now.*

I grabbed my phone from my purse, pointing it up in the air to take a picture. And right there, standing in the Target parking lot, staring at a magnificent orange cloud in the sky, I felt wholly, completely, undeniably in the presence of God.

I couldn't help but think, *This is what it means to be an artist.*

If I could summarize this entire book in a single visual, it would be the headline from that scene: "Weary and defeated mother steps away from shopping cart in Target parking lot to document a spectacular orange cloud in the sky."

This book is about looking for hope when we feel hopeless, searching for light when the day seems dark. This book is about paying attention to beauty and mercy and grace, and then sharing those gifts with the world through our words, our paintings, our music, our photographs.

I come to you not as an expert pushing formulas or prescriptions, but simply as a friend imperfectly living out the message of this book as she writes it. While writing this book, God provided ample (and I mean *ample!*) opportunities for me to practice what I preach. I wrote

the chapter on imposter syndrome while feeling like I had somehow conned my way into a book contract. I wrote the chapter on making space for creativity during a global pandemic, when I often wrote in my car, parked in the driveway, the only place I could be alone. Half-way through writing the chapter on rest, I suffered a miscarriage, forcing me to set down the entire manuscript for almost two weeks as I began to recover physically, mentally, and emotionally.

I still have days when, probably just like you, I am tempted to give up creativity altogether. Days when I desperately want to write, but my daughter refuses to nap. Or days when I finally sit down in front of a blank page, but, two hours later, have nothing to show for myself. Other days, I can become paralyzed with comparison, watching everyone around me create bigger, better, more dazzling things than I will ever make.

But I also know what exists on the other side of those stumbling blocks. Obedience. Wholeness. Fulfillment and delight. I know what it's like to co-create with God, to dream and wonder, to see glorious potential in a pile of scraps. As Makoto Fujimura says, the act of making helps us know the Creator.¹

Therefore, I press on.

Not because I'm self-assured or fearless, but because creativity is one way I draw closer to my Maker, the same One who gave me these children and these talents. The same One who calls us to be good stewards of everything He places in our hands.

Erwin Raphael McManus writes in *The Artisan Soul*, "To leave our gifts and talents unmastered and undeveloped is to leave unwrapped precious treasures entrusted to us."²

My hope and prayer for you as you read this book, and long after you leave its pages, is that you would leave no treasure unwrapped. And that you would, as my pal Steph Smith says, feel me rooting for your becoming on every page.³

So please, dear friend—grab your journal, your instrument, your measuring cups, your camera, whatever you need right here, right now, for *your* creative gifts to shine.

This is your permission slip to write on index cards next to the tub. To bake a strawberry cake while the baby naps. To crochet a scarf on the sidelines of soccer practice.

I know your hands are full. I know you have traces of applesauce smeared on your shirt. I know there are one thousand excuses for why you don't have time to pursue creativity in this season. But I promise you: the journey is worthwhile. I can't wait to show you why.

Here's to creating in the margins.

Here's to creating anyway.

A PERMISSION SLIP

It's the hour right before dinner, the same hour hungry bellies and restlessness often collide in our house. Today, though, in the thick of our mild California winter, we're all grateful for the sunlight pouring through the windows, lighting up our dining room table like a stage.

Nine-year-old Everett hovers at the left corner, lining up various LEGO buildings he carefully transported inside the house from a table in the garage. Carson, seven, sits adjacent, leaning his chair back against the window, creating a comic book titled *Dogman and the Scary Kittens* with a single yellow pencil. Next to Carson, two-year-old Presley sits on her knees, dutifully peeling the wrappers off every crayon in a small plastic container in front of her. Occasionally she breaks a crayon in half and scribbles a dramatic line across a sheet of printer paper. I am tempted to reprimand her, but the act of stripping and breaking the crayons seems to be an essential part of her artistic process.

And then there's me, smooshed at the end of the table within a tiny sliver of space. My laptop is open to iMovie, a program I taught myself



how to use almost a decade ago when I wanted to make a compilation video for Everett's first birthday. I always thought my husband and I would cherish these videos the most, but the kids seem to love them even more than we do. Today I'm working on Presley's birthday video, stitching together dozens of clips to play alongside the song I've chosen—"Mama's Sunshine, Daddy's Rain" by Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors.

My eyes scan the table, and I can't help but notice the mess surrounding me: LEGOS, books, papers, colored pencils, and naked crayons. Presley is now making a small mountain out of her shredded crayon wrappers. The way the afternoon sunlight hits the top of her pile, it almost looks like a volcano.

A few weeks ago, I bought a gorgeous cream-colored linen table runner at a local home store sample sale. It was one of those purchases you think might change your life, or at least the entire aesthetic of your dining room. For exactly one week, our table looked like something you'd see on Pinterest, complete with a curated centerpiece of candles and fresh eucalyptus.

I forgot people actually live here.

Day after day, the runner and its contents got swept aside in favor of space for creative projects: theirs and mine. I remember feeling a flash of irritation the day I finally scrapped my carefully styled decor, but today, looking around this worn and cluttered table, I am content with the work happening here. Concentration. Imagination. Curiosity. The scene doesn't last long. Within minutes, tummies are growling for dinner, and the novelty of destroying crayons has worn off. But I take a split second to breathe this moment in, to notice the energy in the room as all of us create at the same table, at the same time, enveloped in warm, golden light.

For once, I don't feel the need to abandon this setup, to go start dinner or sort mail or fold laundry while my kids are temporarily

occupied. I don't feel the need to assist them either, to hover or micromanage their activities. Rather, I simply feel at ease, as if this is *exactly* what I should be doing in this moment: working on my own creative project while my children work on theirs. I do not feel guilty for being on my laptop in front of my kids, nor do I feel a mounting pressure to be doing something more productive with my time.

Instead, I know for a fact this moment of creating—in front of my kids, alongside my kids—is important and worthwhile and good.

It only took me a decade to believe this.

IN THOSE FIRST FEW WEEKS AT HOME with a milk-drunk newborn in my arms, I Googled every little thing, hopping in and out of online parenting forums, desperate for an instruction manual. *Is it normal for a baby to poop six times in one day? Does breastfeeding ever get easier?* Underneath my nitty-gritty questions loomed the ultimate insecurity every first-time mom battles: *Am I doing this whole motherhood thing right?*

Just a few months prior, I had quit my pencil-skirt-and-high-heels-wearing marketing job to pursue writing and photography. Within the span of a single year, I traded cubicle life for freelance gigs and my childless freedom for motherhood. In my head, I envisioned myself slipping into these new professional and personal roles gracefully, the way a ballerina glides across a stage. In actuality, the transition looked more like an overly confident kid falling off a skateboard.

I struggled with loneliness. At the time, my husband, Brett, commuted an hour to and from work, leaving me home alone with our son, Everett, from roughly seven in the morning to six in the evening. Our days were quiet, monotonous, and unseen. Sometimes we only left the house for a brief walk around the neighborhood.

I think I had been a parent for roughly thirty-six hours when it dawned on me: motherhood doesn't come with permission slips.

Around that time, I discovered podcasts and began popping headphones in my ears on our daily walks, eager to listen to my “friends on the Internet” who didn't know me at all. I loved being home with my son, a privilege I did not take for granted, but most days, I felt utterly invisible. I missed having coworkers. I also missed the proverbial gold stars and the swell of pride I'd feel after being told “Great job.”

Perhaps even more than that, though, I missed the comfort of having a supervisor sign off on my decisions. I craved a nod of approval to accompany the sudden multitude of parenting choices I made each day. A safety net to fall into from time to time.

Having a boss seems like a weird thing to miss, but I often did. And not just because I wanted someone to cover for me on sick days or pat me on the back after I handled an explosive diaper change. Sometimes I simply wished for someone to grant me permission, for someone to whisper, “It's okay to _____.”

It's okay to ask for help.

It's okay to eat cereal for dinner.

It's okay to write while the baby naps, even though the house is a disaster.

I think I had been a parent for roughly thirty-six hours when it dawned on me: motherhood doesn't come with permission slips.



PERMISSION SLIPS FOR MOTHERS

Permission to leave dishes in the sink

Permission to ask for help

Permission to cry in the shower

Permission to say no

Permission to say yes

Permission to rest

Permission to play

Permission to eat cereal for dinner

Permission to outsource

Permission to feel your feelings

Permission to step away from social media

Permission to be a beginner

Permission to not love every second of motherhood

Permission to change your mind

Permission to ask for time alone

Permission to create with no end goal in mind

DAYS AFTER EVERETT TURNED THREE, he gave up his nap cold turkey. *Poof!* Just like that. As a first-time mom, I didn't really know when children stopped napping, but after a few rough weeks for both of us, I realized *I* wasn't ready for naptime to end. So, I did what any other former marketing professional would do: *I rebranded naptime*. I gave it a new name, a sparkly new logo, a whole new elevator pitch. Moving forward, naptime would be known as Quiet Time.

Every day, I started putting the baby gate on the doorframe of Everett's bedroom. I'd turn on all the lights, crank up a kid-friendly playlist,

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Q: Why do you create?

A: I create for repair—both in myself and in the world. I believe that acts of creativity have the propensity to shine light in the darkness. Art, by any measure, can bring about laughter, beauty, truth, hope, and love—just to name a few.

Q: Do you believe everyone is creative?

A: Sometimes, I think we get caught up in the term *creative*. More than



believing everyone is creative, I believe that everyone is always creating something. A painting, a meal, a picture of their children, a card to a grandparent. Our lungs create oxygen and our body creates blood. We are always making something.

get all his favorite toys down from the top of the closet, and leave him in there to play alone. We started at twenty minutes a day, then upped it to thirty, then forty, and so on. Eventually, we worked our way up to an hour of quiet time each day, and I hailed myself a parental genius. (Isn't it incredible how first-time moms go from clueless to expert in the span of a few years? Bless.)

Much to my delight, Everett began using his quiet time to build things. He would gather all his blocks, magnetic tiles, and Hot Wheels, then construct little creations all over the floor. He'd create castles and car washes and racetracks. One time, he even built a "Target"—an adorable nod to a place where we had already spent too much time and money during his short life. I don't know where he learned this word, but he started calling his creations *masterpieces*. Oftentimes, he would even dedicate them: "I made *this* masterpiece for Daddy, and I made *this* masterpiece for Mommy."

I became equal parts fascinated, impressed, and inspired by his creativity. At three years old, without any prompting whatsoever, Everett aspired to make order from chaos. To imagine what was possible. To take a messy pile of toys and turn it into a masterpiece.

Peering in at him from the hallway one day, I couldn't help but wonder, *Where did he learn this? Where did this desire to create come from?*

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS WE LEARN about God in Scripture is that He created, and one of the first things we learn about ourselves is that we are made in His likeness. If God is the first artist—and we are a walking, breathing reflection of Him—this means our desire to create is *hereditary*, a fundamental imprint of His Spirit in us.

Right off the bat, God tasks mankind with taking care of the earth and naming the animals.¹ From the very beginning, God calls us to be good stewards of His creation and invites us to co-create with Him.

God filled the world with good things and calls us to do the same—to showcase hope, light, beauty, and restoration as part of the ongoing process of God’s glory infusing the earth.

I’m reminded of Anne Lamott’s words: “To be great, art has to point somewhere.”²

God did not create us to be mere spectators, watching on the sidelines inhaling popcorn while He does all the work. Rather, He invites us to be *active* participants, co-laborers in making the invisible Kingdom visible. The act of creating is part of our calling as image bearers.

There is no better permission slip than this: to know and believe with your whole heart that the God who made you, the same God who designed blueprints for the galaxies and poured the foundation of the earth, designed you in His likeness, on purpose, for a purpose.

Permission to create already exists inside of you. It’s running through your blood, your bones, every strand of DNA embedded in the body God made from dust. You have permission to pursue your creative gifts as a testament to who God created you to be. You have permission to make beautiful things in a broken world as a testament to God’s grace mightily at work in you.

You don’t need to wait another second for some metaphorical boss to show up at your front door with a permission slip to create. You can stop staring at the sky waiting for God to carve a yes in the clouds. He’s already carved a yes in *you*.

EVERETT IS NOW NINE. He’s swapped Magna-Tiles for LEGOs, and I no longer barricade him in his room for an hour a day. But his desire to create? It’s still there, strong as ever. A few weeks ago, he created a “squirrel trap” in the backyard. I was slightly horrified when he told me, until I realized what he had *actually* made was more of a feeding trough. He had filled a basket with oranges from the neighbor’s tree,

Permission to create already exists inside of you. It's running through your blood, your bones, every strand of DNA embedded in the body God made from dust.

along with a handful of trail mix and a small bowl of peanut butter. Then, using a bungee cord he found in the yard, he hung the basket from a tree branch and built a set of brick "stairs" for the squirrels to reach it.

Aside from making him promise to put that bowl straight in the dishwasher when all was said and done, I blessed him on his adventures and went back to folding laundry. That day, though, I realized my kids never ask permission to create. Every day, they simply gather what's in front of them and begin making stuff: puppet shows and origami, domino towers and squirrel traps. I don't know if it's ever occurred to my children to ask whether or not they *could* create, whether or not they are *allowed to*. For them, the act of creating is a given, a birthright. Anything in this house, this garage, this yard, is fair game for masterpiece-building.

And so it is with us.

How many times do we hand our children blocks, Play-Doh, crayons, and tell them to go nuts? *Here, kids, go make something.*

Just like our children, we, too, are surrounded by raw materials brimming with possibility. God's given us the earth so we can garden. He's given us words and language so we can tell stories and record miracles. He's given us heat and metal and elements that bend so we can shape things with our hands. He's given us light, color, texture, food, music, senses that engage and make us feel alive.

Here, kids, go make something.

WHEN MY FRIEND CALLIE was struggling with whether or not to pursue her MFA as a mom of two young girls, her husband said, “Callie, you will *always* be a mom. You are not *only* a mom.”

As mothers, we can be prone to feelings of guilt anytime we pursue something that takes away time from our children, especially if we deem that thing frivolous or unnecessary. Sadly, creativity is often viewed through a lens of unimportance because in our society, art rarely has value unless an audience applauds it or offers to buy it. When our creative efforts fail to yield standing ovations or impressive paychecks, it’s easy to slide creativity into the hobby category, filing it away as nonessential, insignificant, or trivial.

Perhaps even . . . *selfish*.

When we label creativity as selfish, it’s understandable that we’d feel immediate tension with the selflessness we typically attribute to motherhood.

Jonathan Rogers, author and creative writing teacher, addresses this specific tension in a note to mothers. He writes

If you think of your creative efforts as primarily self-expression, or self-indulgence or self-anything, then, of course a loving, giving person is going to find it very hard to prioritize creative efforts. But I want to suggest to you that your creative efforts are among the most important ways that you can be loving and giving to your family and to the communities in which you find yourself.³

He goes on to reference 1 Peter 3:15, where Peter says we should always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in us. Rogers argues when we create, that is exactly what we are doing. When we engage in creative acts, when we write and draw and plant seeds in the dirt, when we create lovely things that point back to the goodness of our Maker, we are giving an account of the hope that is in us.

Creativity is a fundamental part of being human, of being an image bearer, of being alive.

Our culture is obsessed with final products people can sell and rate, but creativity is so much more than that. Creativity is joy, and healing, and worship, the lavish combination of consciousness, gratitude, and inspiration. Creativity is not a simple commodity, something we shuffle around buying and selling at the market square. Creativity is a fundamental part of being human, of being an image bearer, of being alive.

I once heard someone describe good instructors as those who bring oxygen into a room.⁴ I love that phrase, and I believe it applies to artists as well. When we make art, we bring oxygen into the room. We give people something true and beautiful to breathe in.

What if we stopped viewing creativity as something that *takes away* from our families and viewed it as something that *breathes life* into our families instead—through the meals we make, the pictures we take, the homes we decorate, the music we play, the stories we write, the gardens we grow?

What if, instead of deeming creativity as trivial or selfish, we viewed our personal creativity as a gift, an offering, a contribution capable of blessing everyone around us?

A FEW WEEKS AGO, my son came in from the backyard with a heart-shaped rock in his hand. “Look what I found!” he said, placing it on the corner of my desk. He told me it seemed like something I would like. He was right, of course. My kids notice when a cloud is shaped like a rhinoceros, or when a sunset looks like God painted the sky.

They follow my lead when I walk around our yard trimming flowers to bring inside the house, plucking their own tiny yellow buds from the grass and leaving them on my nightstand.

It's possible they would do all of this anyway, regardless of me. But I believe when we engage in the act of creating in front of our children—when we write stories and bake cookies and dig our hands in the dirt—we invite our kids to do the same. When we pay attention to the world, to the flowers growing in the cracks of sidewalks, we model an appreciation for beauty, for creation. When we walk confidently in the talents God has given us, we model faithfulness, obedience, and stewardship.

As a mother, I *want* my kids to engage in creative acts, and not just when they're little as a way to keep them occupied, or when they're teenagers as a way to keep them out of trouble. Rather, I want my children to pursue creativity for their whole lives, for the sake of the sheer joy and reverence that accompanies co-creating with their Maker.

Like anything else, if we want to instill a love of creativity in our children for the long haul, we have to model what that looks like. We have to show our kids that grown-ups are creative, too.

That *mothers* are creative, too.

You and I have been commissioned to create from the very start, by an infinitely creative God. Our permission has already been granted. We can stop waiting, hesitating, wondering if we are allowed to mother *and* create.

The answer is yes.

Let's sweep the fancy decor off the dining room table, and take our seats.

CREATIVE EXERCISE

If someone were to give you a glass jar full of permission slips you could use at any time, what would be written on them? Write a list of permission slips you can use as you mother and create.

JOURNALING PROMPT

Do you view creativity as a selfish act? Why or why not?

