



Motherhood makes high demands. Will you pour out your life for your children while getting little in return? No, you can expect something truly beautiful out of motherhood! Behind all the giving that mothers do is the receiving of something wonderful—growth in God from the special joys of motherhood.

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Chapter 1

JESUS BY YOUR SIDE

*If you want to get warm you must stand
near the fire: if you want to be wet you
must get into the water. If you want joy,
power, peace, eternal life,
you must get close to, or even into,
the thing that has them.¹*

—C. S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

EXPECT JESUS TO BE YOUR DEAREST FRIEND

What's your earliest memory of motherhood? Mine goes back to my mom. She opened the blinds to let the sunshine in, cheered for me at swim meets, hosted fun birthday parties, and made amazing Philly cheesesteaks—but the most important thing she did was introduce me to Jesus. You could see glimpses of it yourself in a rickety, circa-1980s home video. I'm a curly-haired

toddler wearing an orange jacket with the hood cinched around my chubby cheeks. My mom is kneeling next to me, holding a microphone as I sing an old gospel chorus, “Mine, mine, mine, Jesus is mine. Mine in the morning, mine in the evening.” She taught me this song and many others like it. She read Bible stories to me and prayed for me.

Mom says I was two-and-a-half years old when I sat in the kitchen and said, “Last night when I was in bed, Jesus came into my heart.” Although a toddler’s confession of faith may not be the most reliable thing in the world, I believe mine was genuine because, forty years later, I can honestly say that Jesus has been my Lord and Savior ever since. Though I have often strayed from Him, He has faithfully pursued me. I’ve always sensed Him carrying me close to His heart.

HOW DO WE KNOW WE’RE DOING IT RIGHT?

As a child, I loved to play “mommy.” I would gather my dolls on my lap and teach them Bible stories. I’d feed them plastic peas with a tiny plastic spoon and tuck them into their doll beds. Motherhood seemed simple and satisfying. Now that I am the mother of real, live children, I’m learning that motherhood is far more complex than I thought it would be. For example, I teach my children songs about Jesus and we talk about His love, but I cannot make them lay hold of Him. I work hard to clothe and feed them, but they don’t eat their peas as readily as my dolls did.

I tuck them into bed, tell them stories, rub their backs, and army crawl out of their rooms only to see them pop out of bed, bright-eyed and ready for an all-nighter. *What to do?*

Although raising a child can be deeply satisfying, it sure does come with never-ending unknowns. How do we know we're doing it right? What's best for these little people whom we love so much? And how can we maintain some sense of personhood even when we're completely immersed in the daily work of caring for our kids?

Sometimes I wonder if God wants me to figure out a way to faithfully raise my children while maximizing my potential, multiplying my talents, and doing ministry work outside our home. I wonder if I am supposed to "do it all," and when I fail miserably (which I do), it's simply because I'm too lazy, disorganized, or selfish. Or do I indulge my children with too much attention when I should be doing more outside my home? Or am I too distracted and not giving my kids enough care and companionship? Sometimes I wonder if I'm just sidelined in the great walk of faith until I can get it all together.

Does God care? When He created children to be so needy and mothers to be so necessary for their survival, did He shrug off the eighteen-plus years His daughters would be thoroughly consumed by motherhood? Does He provide any help for the journey?

When I feel overwhelmed, this verse gives me peace. When I feel sidelined, this verse assures me I am not. When I wonder if God cares, this verse assures me that He does.

EXPECT SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Whenever I'm struggling with these questions, a particular verse in the Bible answers me with unmistakable clarity. It's like a bodyguard, protecting me from discouragement. When I feel overwhelmed, this verse gives me peace. When I feel sidelined, this verse assures me I am not. When I wonder if God cares, this verse assures me that He does.

This verse has been a game changer for me in motherhood, and I think it will be for you too.

It's Isaiah 40:11.

*He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.*

In this single sentence, the prophet Isaiah assures us that Jesus sees us. He cares about us. He is with us in motherhood. The better we grasp these truths, the better we can navigate the questions and doubts that come our way. We're going to explore these truths in more detail, but first we have to zoom out and take a look at Isaiah 40 for some context.

THE BIG PICTURE

Have you ever seen the conclusion of a World War II movie when Allied soldiers drive through Europe announcing that the war is over? As the soldiers work their way through war-ravaged towns

with the good news, people emerge from their hiding places, blinking in astonishment, hoping life will finally be as it should: peaceful and free of fear. The villagers clear the rubble and rebuild their homes. Flowers grow. Children play. Mothers smile.

Isaiah 40 is this type of long-awaited announcement: Jerusalem's warfare will be over when the Messiah comes to pardon her iniquity and redeem her. Life will finally be as it should. People will emerge from their hiding places, no longer terrorized by sin and death. They will build their homes, knowing all is well. This announcement of peace is the longing of every human heart. No wonder God begins Isaiah 40 with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people."

Isaiah goes on to describe the Messiah who will put an end to our war and give us peace. He says the Messiah is far beyond our comprehension. He is the Creator who has cupped the oceans in His palm, measured the sky with His hand, and named the stars. The entire chapter is a rousing account of the Messiah's preeminence over creation. To set up Isaiah 40:11, Isaiah writes in verse 10,

*Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.*

***Though we may
content ourselves
on scraps and
seconds, Jesus cares
for us the way a
shepherd cares
for the ewes. Jesus
takes special care
of mothers.***

EXPECT SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

From this context, we may imagine the Messiah as a fierce warrior marching victoriously over the conquered earth, but that's not how Isaiah goes on to describe Him. Instead, Isaiah says that our great victor is like a shepherd who gathers His flock around Him, holds the lambs in His arms, and gently leads the mama ewes. On this side of redemptive history, we understand that Jesus is the Shepherd, our children are the lambs, and you and I are the mother sheep. And we are an integral part of His victory march.

Isaiah 40:11 assures us that Jesus does not sideline mothers, nor does He deal harshly with us, expecting us to do it all. On the contrary, Jesus takes special care of mothers. It's not that we're more important or weaker than anyone else, but because we give of our very substance to nurture children made in the image of God, Jesus pulls us close to His side.

Though we may content ourselves on scraps and seconds, Jesus cares for mothers the way a shepherd cares for nursing ewes. He feeds us with the highest quality nutrient-dense food, provides an abundance of fresh water, fends off our enemies, guides us step by step in the shadowlands, and remains our closest companion.

OUR CHILDREN BELONG TO GOD

I love this portrait of Jesus as He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart. These lambs are our children. Take a moment to imagine your child in His strong, capable arms.

Sometimes I forget that my children belong to Jesus. Then I recall that He has created each child and has recorded their days in His book. He thinks about them constantly and died for those who believe in Him, that they would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Throughout Scripture, He advocates for children, teaching us to care about their physical and spiritual well-being. He compels us to love them dearly because they are His own.

Jesus came to us as a child Himself. Then, when He was an adult embarking on intense ministry work, Jesus welcomed children into His arms and blessed them. His fervent disciples assumed the children were inconveniencing Him, so they pushed them aside, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14).

Here Jesus shows us the beautiful balance of engaging in the work of the kingdom and stopping everything to show the little ones how precious they are to God. You and I may hold our children close to our hearts, but what really matters is that the Lord Strong and Mighty holds them close to His.

Too often, we assume that God can't possibly include "motherhood" on His list of good works. We think that motherhood is just something we must juggle while we pursue the real good works.

JESUS LEADS US IN MOTHERHOOD

When God gives a woman the gift of a child, He also gives her the gift of good work. Remember the mission statement at the beginning of this book? He ordained it all, from diapers to discipling.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.—Ephesians 2:10

Too often, we question the value of motherhood's work. We wonder, is it enough? I want to cheer us on with a resounding "Yes!" The stuff of motherhood is at the heart and soul of our faith: as moms, we literally feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give the thirsty something to drink. Jesus said, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). On top of that, motherhood includes the good work of entrusting our children into God's hands and pointing them to Jesus every chance we get. We equip our children for the good works that God has planned for them to do, and we strengthen them with wisdom and love. Day after day, we work to build a home life that—in some miraculous way—provides a tangible picture of the family of God.

There's no doubt about it: the work of motherhood is profoundly good. By this point, you may actually feel a bit intimidated by the magnitude of your calling to be a mom. Be encouraged by Paul David Tripp who writes, God "is not so unwise, unkind, or

unfaithful as to ever call us to a task without enabling us to do it.”² Remember, we are not alone in this. God will lead us one step at a time. Our job is to follow Him.

Christians often talk about following Jesus, but what does it really mean? Why do we follow Jesus? And where is He leading us? Is He a tour guide who recommends wholesome family activities? Is He a life coach who helps us maximize our potential and find true happiness? Is He a consultant who answers our questions about baby food, temper tantrums, and social media? In order to get the most out of motherhood, we have to figure out what it really means to follow Jesus.

The next section answers these questions. It may seem a bit academic, but I can assure you that there is nothing more practical for our everyday life. So, pour yourself a tall glass of water and get ready to consider some deep foundational truths about Jesus and your life as a mom.

Jesus leads us out of sin. Jesus said He came to earth, “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). His mission in becoming a man, dying on a cross, and being raised from the grave was to rescue us from sin, restore our relationship with God, and give us eternal life. He elaborated on His mission when He said,

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,*

EXPECT SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

*to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*—Luke 4:18–19

This passage illuminates what Jesus did and what He is still doing as the Savior of the world. Now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, Jesus is still proclaiming the good news, releasing captives, recovering sight, and rescuing oppressed people through the power of His Holy Spirit and the ministry of His church. He wants to lead us and our kids out of sin so that we may experience abundant life too. He wants to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

Jesus leads us to be like Him. Motherhood has a way of helping us see our desperation for certain qualities we can't muster up on our own. We can't be perfect moms, no matter how hard we try. Thankfully, Jesus wants our parenting to overflow from Him so that, as we walk with Him through life, we will become more and more like Him. And not just so we can become better parents, but so we can become His holy bride.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

—Ephesians 5:25–27

Jesus leads us to make disciples. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gathered His disciples and said,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
—Matthew 28:19–20

He was calling all His disciples—including you and me—to work alongside Him in bringing His kingdom to earth. Our children are our dearest and closest “nation.” Jesus wants them to hear His Word and believe in His name. He will always lead us to teach our kids about God, to pray for them, and to worship God with them. He will always lead us to live vibrantly, full of His glory.

Jesus leads us home. Our twenty-first-century lives, between the first and second coming of Christ, mirror the way God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, led them through the wilderness for forty years, and brought them home to the promised land.

On a much grander scale, Jesus has rescued us from slavery to sin and is leading us through the wilderness of this sinful world to our eternal home, our promised land. In fact, when Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12), He was referring to the way God led the Israelites through the wilderness as a bright cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Jesus is our pillar of light. He is on the move, leading us toward eternity.

I often get shortsighted and forget to look forward to eternity. Because “each day has enough trouble of its own,” I tend to focus my energy on getting through the day, but Jesus said not

—————
Every day, Jesus is working through motherhood to prepare us—and our children—for heaven.

to “worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:34 NIV); He didn’t say, “Don’t think about tomorrow.” In fact, as we follow Jesus through this wilderness, we must think about our magnificent, soul-satisfying, everything-as-it-should-be *tomorrow*. In every quotidian task, we are stepping forward to heaven. This heaven:

Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”—Revelation 7:9–10

And this:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”—Revelation 21:3–4

Every day, Jesus is working through motherhood to prepare us—and our children—for heaven.

Yes, Jesus cares about our specific parenting decisions. Yes,

He leads us toward good choices regarding family activities, baby food, and social media. But He ultimately leads us to heaven, where we will worship Him forever with people from every nation, starting with our little tribe at home.

FOLLOWING JESUS IN MOTHERHOOD

Now that we've examined why (and where) Jesus is leading us in motherhood, it may be helpful to consider what it looks like to follow our Good Shepherd in real time.

God recently used these truths to lead me through a common motherhood struggle. Here's what happened:

It was on a day when I had been harsh with my four-year-old son. I kept pushing him away in anger instead of drawing him close in love. I needed to repent and ask God for help. The next chance I got, I talked to Jesus as if He were literally walking next to me, holding my son in His arms. The question before me was not "What *would* Jesus do?" but "What *is* Jesus doing?" I wanted to know, what is Jesus doing as He holds my son close to His heart? What is Jesus doing as He gently leads me in motherhood?

The question is not "What would Jesus do?" but "What is Jesus doing?"

Jesus is sitting down next to our heavenly Father as our perfect righteousness (Heb. 10:12–14).

He is redeeming our brokenness (Rom. 5:9–11).

EXPECT SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

He is loving us unconditionally (Rom. 8:35–39).

Jesus is inviting my son and me to approach God's throne and ask for help any time we need it (Heb. 4:16).

He is rooting out our sin and making us holy (Heb. 12:5–11).

He is sending His Spirit to convict, comfort, teach, and woo us (John 16:8).

He is working all things for His glory and our good (Rom. 8:28).

Jesus is beckoning both of us to abide in Him and to bear fruit that will last (John 15:4–5).

He is sending His angels to guard us (Ps. 91:11–12).

And, ever so faithfully, He is praying for my son to become a son of God. He is praying for me to draw close to Him and point my son in His direction (Heb. 7:25; 1 Peter 2:9–10).

I didn't come up with all the answers right then and there. In fact, my mom helped me scour the Bible in search of Jesus' footsteps so I could see where to walk and how to respond to my son. Looking back on my day, though, I can't adequately describe the way these truths transformed my motherhood. I saw my son through new eyes and could use strategies that effectively spoke to his heart and engaged his mind. The Holy Spirit brought these truths to my attention just in time to transform my coldhearted reactions into something better. Jesus helped me win my son's heart that day. I hope I never forget it.

JESUS BY YOUR SIDE

You and I are not alone on our motherhood journey. Jesus is leading us like a shepherd one step at a time, teaching us to be like Himself, and preparing us for heaven. This is profoundly good for us and the children we love.



RECEIVING JESUS BY YOUR SIDE

Something to cherish:

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.—Isaiah 40:11

Something to sing:

“Jesus, See the Traveler” by Sara Groves

Something to read:

Long Days of Small Things by Catherine McNeil

Something to consider:

- In what ways has mothering been good for me? How has it been hard for me?
- In what ways have I felt God gently lead me?
- In what areas of mothering do I need to seek the Lord’s care and leadership?

MY PRAYER FOR YOU: *May you receive the gift of motherhood with open arms as you draw close to Jesus and become more like Him. May you see motherhood through His eyes, think His thoughts, and treat your child the way He does. When your little flock needs comfort, companionship, or correction, may you turn your eyes toward Jesus, hold His little ones close, and show them the Good Shepherd.*

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