



GLORIA FURMAN

MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

The Everyday Ministry of Motherhood in the Grand Plan of God



“Gloria’s words, challenges, and high view of mothering were what my heart knew to be true in the years of my own mothering journey. I enthusiastically endorse this call to us as women to nurture, to create, and to believe God for the glory of the gospel in the lives of those he has placed in our paths. May thousands of women accept Gloria’s challenge to be used by God to transform lives for the glory of his kingdom in their homes and in their worlds. Selah!”

Barbara Rainey, Cofounder, FamilyLife; mom of six; author,
Letters to My Daughters: The Art of Being a Wife

“With Christ-centered clarity, Gloria shows that our Savior calls us to a grand, global mission to nurture his disciples for his glory. This book is for every redeemed woman whose mothering heart longs to nurture biological and spiritual children.”

Susan Hunt, former Director of Women’s Ministries, PCA; co-author,
Women’s Ministry in the Local Church

“With a firm grasp of the biblical narrative and a sharp focus on the mission of God, Gloria Furman challenges us to see motherhood as it is—not just a high calling but a part of the mission of God. You’ll be encouraged and challenged by this book!”

Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research; author, *Subversive Kingdom*;
www.edstetzer.com

“Gloria Furman writes from a place of great wisdom and deep trust in Christ, but she also just gets the chaos of it all. She will humbly take you by the hand and help you dream about how to unleash into the world children who actually love Jesus and want to impact their world to do the same.”

Jennie Allen, Founder and Visionary, *IF:Gathering*; author,
Anything and *Restless*

“*Missional Motherhood* is an excellent reminder of my most important job: to teach my children the glorious gospel. Gloria Furman encourages us as moms, amidst all our other responsibilities, to make disciples, starting in our own home. You will be challenged, encouraged, and blessed as you read this beautiful, powerful book.”

Heather Platt, mother of four; wife of David Platt, President,
International Mission Board

“This is no DIY-perfect-parenting book. The cross looms large over its pages as Gloria swings open the gallery doors of Scripture to show us stunning portraits of Christ and the panorama of his far-reaching redemption. Reading this book made me want to get ahead of the kingdom choir in Revelation 5 and sing with joy, ‘Worthy is the Lamb!’”

Tim Keese, Founder and Executive Director, Frontline Missions International; author, *Dispatches from the Front*

“Gloria shows us that motherhood is more about God than about mothering, and that brings me great comfort as I parent four children and disciple other women around me. *Missional Motherhood* is about living, doing, teaching, and talking all about the Word of God and not just how we parent our children in our home. If you are a woman who loves Jesus, this is a book you should devour, regardless of whether or not you are a parent. I can’t wait to share this book with all the women in my life!”

Jamie Ivey, host, *The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey* podcast, JamieIvey.com

“Believing that our biblical theology as moms directs the way we view the mission of motherhood, Gloria takes us through a journey in both marveling at the greatness of God’s plan for redemption and embracing the opportunity to make an eternal impact from the everyday context of mothering. *Missional Motherhood* leads weary moms back to the gospel and reminds us that we are investing our lives in what is eternal.”

Ruth Chou Simons, mother of six boys; artist, writer; owner, gracelaced.com

“Gloria Furman does an incredible job of helping mothers rediscover the pattern, promises, and power of Jesus in the midst of everyday life. This book will galvanize you to see and treasure Jesus as the aim and fuel of your everyday mission as you make disciples. So, moms: pour over this book to get a renewed vision for the radically significant mission you’ve been called to. Sons and daughters: read this book to catch a glimpse of the soul-stirring vision of Jesus your mother sacrifices to live out in front of you. Fathers and husbands: read this book to see the all-encompassing mission of God that your wife is living out right now.”

Michael “Stew” Stewart, Founding Director, Verge Network and Conferences



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in the Grand Plan of God



Gloria Furman

*Missional Motherhood: The Everyday Ministry of Motherhood
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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

Cover design: Jeff Miller, Faceout Studio

First printing 2016

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-5227-4

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-5230-4

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-5228-1

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-5229-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Furman, Gloria, 1980- author.

Title: Missional motherhood : the everyday ministry of motherhood in the grand plan of God / Gloria Furman.

Description: Wheaton : Crossway, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016009734 (print) | LCCN 2016011160 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433552274 (tp : alk. paper) |

ISBN 9781433552281 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433552298 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433552304 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Motherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Mothers—Religious life.

Classification: LCC BV4529.18 .F865 2016 (print) | LCC BV4529.18 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/431—dc23

LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2016009734>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

RRDC 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Warmly dedicated to
Tiffany James and Tiffany Sumlin,
who missionally mothered college freshman girls
by laboring in prayer, teaching the gospel,
and sharing their very lives.



*Jesus invites women to missional motherhood:
to follow his pattern, to trust his promises, and to nurture
others by the power he provides.*

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Acknowledgments

Books are a community project, and I have many people I want to thank for their help.

To my husband, *Dave*, thank you for everything—for your time and energy, prayers and love. And thank you, *Aliza, Norah Claire, Judson, and Troy*, for inspiring me with your childlike faith and your love for “neighbors who don’t know good news yet.”

I’m grateful for the influence of my mother, *Catherine*, whose embodiment of hopeful patience is a great encouragement to me.

Several women have shared with me their wisdom, skills, and time, helping to shape the content of this book at every level through personal conversations or manuscript reviewing. This book is far better thanks to *Theresa Barkley, Kris Lawrence, Angelia Stewart, Jenny Davis, and Bev Berrus*. Special thanks go to *Karalee Reinke*, whose laser focus on the gospel has sharpened and brightened every page.

I’d like to thank the entire team at Crossway for their enthusiastic support, especially *Justin Taylor, Amy Kruis, Angie Cheatham, and Lydia Brownback*.

Though I doubt that many men imagine that their names would appear in a book with “motherhood” in the title, I owe these particular scholars a debt of gratitude. Through their varied writings they have helped shape my perspective, showing me how biblical theology has everything to do with the meaning and mission of motherhood. I am thankful for the ministries of *G. K. Beale, Kevin*

12 *Acknowledgments*

Vanhooser, Tom Schreiner, D. A. Carson, John Piper, T. Desmond Alexander, Graeme Goldsworthy, and Geerhardus Vos.

I could not have started and finished writing this book if it hadn't been for the generous assistance of *Katlyn Griffin* and the encouragement of *Andrew Wolgemuth*. Thank you!



Introduction



What Is This Book About?

You are not “just” a mom.

My mission in writing this book is to show how motherhood is part of the mission of God, thereby banishing, once and for all, the insipid notion that mothering is insignificant. There’s no such thing as “just a mom,” because there is no mere “just” in the calling of motherhood. That is a wicked lie that is set on fire by hell. You have never met “just” a mother—or “just” a woman, for that matter. I also want to make the case for “every woman mothering” ministry. Every woman is created to nurture (mother) the life that God himself creates. And that is why Satan hates women who mother others.

I realize that talk of banishing things and hell and Satan sounds melodramatic in a preface, but I hope you’ll see before the end of chapter 1 all the evidence against the modern scorn and trivialization of motherhood. If you think it sounds like I’m picking a side in a Mommy War, you are right. Ever since the Serpent hissed the first flaming lie into the first woman’s ears, we’ve been at war, struggling against the evil powers and principalities that once held us in sin. There are forces at work in this world that are hell-bent on banishing life, especially life that is created in the image of

God. But now the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people (Titus 2:11). Satan tries to banish life, but God calls us to nurture life. This book shows that motherhood is mission, in light of Jesus's work in creation, redemption, and his triumph over his enemies.

I want you to know that I'm not against the whimsical aspect of motherhood—not in the least. I've stared at my babies' eyelashes in wonder and wished I could bottle up the sounds, smells, and feelings of certain mommy moments in my memory forever. I know the thrill of hope when a lightbulb turns on in a child or a woman I'm discipling. I lie awake in bed at night, giddy as I dream up things to talk about with my neighbor who is interested in Christianity. The other day my youngest son told his first "knock knock" joke, and you would think that the Red Sox had won the World Series by the volume of cheering in our car. My daughter designed and built a habitat for a caterpillar and a bunch of ladybugs that she caught on vacation, and I took pictures of every angle. A friend wrote to testify of God's faithfulness through her first week of being a mom. I thoroughly enjoy all the heart-pounding thrills of being a mother and a disciple maker. I also appreciate the maternal gravity that helps to ground a family in stability in this sin-sick, crazy world. I'm convinced that the seriously precious moments and exhilarating love of a mother for her children and a woman for her disciples reach new heights when the theological ground underneath is rock solid.

A mother's love is a powerful gift. Hallmark cards agree with me on that one, but where does this gift come from? What kind of gift is it? Why do we experience it? Where is it going? I want to show you in this book that *the everyday ministry of motherhood is part of God's mission*. The nature of our nurture is mission. Motherhood is a gift, because it is a reminder that life is a gift.

God did not create motherhood as "just" a list of to-dos. God did not create motherhood as "just" a sentimental greeting card. God did not create motherhood as a trifling, negligible "just."

“God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”¹ Nothing he does or wills could possibly be inconsequential or petty. No woman made in God’s image, made for God’s mission, could be “just” a mom. Missional motherhood is a strategic ministry designed by God to call people to worship the One who is seated on the throne in heaven.

I’m excited to explain that idea more, because it thrills my heart when I remember it. To think that God has called me to meaningful mission in my motherhood—and that it is all of *grace*—blows me away. This book has one main point in a two-part outline that is held together by an introduction and a conclusion, which are like two bookends. Here’s the book’s summary in one sentence:

Jesus invites women to missional motherhood: to follow his pattern, to trust his promises, and to nurture others by the power he provides.

When you unpack a suitcase after a trip, you tend to go straight for what you need right away. Perhaps you go straight for your toothbrush or your medication and leave the dirty laundry for later. You bring out what you need first. So, first, we look at an explanation of why missional motherhood is for every woman (not just biological or adoptive mothers), because *mother* is a verb too. We see in the rest of part 1 the foundation for missional motherhood, which is really just a fly-over retelling of the Big Story with an eye for how God has revealed his missional pattern for motherhood and gives promises regarding his plan.

After that, in part 2, we study the implications of the Big Story for our missional motherhood. In those chapters we look at some of the many ways Christian moms all over the world display God’s pattern and claim God’s promises as they make Christ’s disciples. Lastly, of course, I have a conclusion, which is the second bookend. In “The End of Motherhood” we’ll see that “Missional Motherhood Is about a Man.”

We're going on a high-flying adventure as we scan the Bible to see God's handiwork in creating and sustaining motherhood for his mission of glorifying himself in all the earth. Recently, I saw a video on YouTube of an eagle being released from the top of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, with a GoPro camera strapped to its body. The footage they caught from the camera is overwhelming. Soaring on the winds and lifted high over the horizon where the sea meets the sky, angling wings to steer into a new panoramic view of the Arabian Desert, dipping dramatically over the metropolis below—it's all there. I hope that reading this book is kind of like watching that perspective-shaping video.

God has placed each of us in different families, churches, denominations, cities, countries, cultures, and seasons. We've been given strengths and weaknesses, responsibilities and privileges. I'm a mom of four kids, and the good works that God has prepared for me to walk in are being played out in and around an eighth-floor flat in the "old town" neighborhood in Dubai, a diverse city in the Middle East. One of my friends and fellow church members is an older single woman who works in a corporate office, travels a lot, and engages her coworkers in Bible study. Our missional mothering looks different in our contexts, but the source and goal of our ministry is the same. The two of us may be aware of one or two things God is doing in our ministries at any given moment, but only he knows the breadth and depth of his activity in and through us.²

I'll explain more in the introduction how this book is for every woman in her everyday ministry, and I do hope that groups of women will read it together. I'm praying that you will find an opportunity to sit down with a cinnamon scone and a dear sister in Christ. If you can only find one, go for the scone. (I'm kidding! Go for the sister.) I'm praying that friends will talk about it using hands-free ear buds during their commute or while sitting on the train on the way to Bible study. I'm praying for the moms sitting cross-legged on the carpet holding each others' babies in order to read this book together in community. I'm praying for the empty

nesters who seek a quiet place to read along with a friend. And I'm praying for new moms, who could do as I did when I couldn't fall back to sleep after feeding my babies: read by the glowing light of the headlamp you're wearing on your forehead (best baby shower gift *ever*), and send emails back and forth to your friends who are awake on the other side of the world.

So we've recognized that for every woman who reads this book, there are that many diverse contexts represented among us. As in every conversation, it is always tempting to bring everything back around to yourself. (Oh, how I *loathe* this bad habit of mine! See what I did there?) For every time that I talk about my own particular context in this book, I want to be stringently committed to making sure that any exhortation I give to you springs up out of the text of God's word. Heaven knows that what you *don't* need is a book full of my quirky, half-baked how-tos that only work a pathetic percentage of the time. This book is not a catalog of my creative ideas for living missionally—I believe those creative ideas are going to be generated in your own heart as the Spirit strengthens your faith and leads your family.

The aim in *Missional Motherhood* is to give you laser focus on what God's word says about his mission, how motherhood fits in to that, and what Christ has done to fuel and fulfill our everyday ministry as moms. As far as personal application, I'm praying that the Lord will do his work, so you can see the application he has for your life. On every page, the personal application is there for the taking as you ask yourself: "What does God's mission mean for *my own life*? What does this mean for *our lives*, as sisters who are members of one another in Christ's body?" In this particular book I think it will be helpful to think about specific application for missional motherhood in terms of "head, heart, hand, and mouth":

- How does this truth *renew my mind* in the truth? Do I need to change my mind about God, his mission, the gospel, motherhood, my mission, or something else?

- How does this truth *thrill my heart* to love Jesus? Are there affections in my heart that he needs to replace?
- How does this truth *strengthen my hands* for the sacrificial service of nurturing others? How is the Lord leading me to serve?
- How does this truth *open my mouth* to share the good news? What would God have me say to the disciples and the nonbelievers around me?

Let's ask for God's help as we discover the breathtaking virtue of Jesus Christ and the mission he has designed for our mothering.

Part 1

MOTHERHOOD IN THE GRAND PLAN OF GOD

Nurturing Life in the Face of Death





Mother Is a Verb Too

I was fired from my first job after only one week. The details are a little fuzzy in my own memory, so I have to rely on my parents to sort out the facts for me. I was, after all, still in elementary school. Reading is my favorite pastime, and my obsession with the written word developed early. When I was in elementary school, one of my teachers took notice. My teacher thought my zeal and skills would be an encouragement to some children in my class who were behind in reading, so she paired me up to help a few of my classmates.

The arrangement didn't last long. My disappointed teacher explained to my parents that while their daughter loved to read, little Gloria lacked the patience to bring other children along with her. I don't remember my feelings being hurt when I was "fired" though. Not having to spend my precious reading time tutoring other kids in reading didn't seem like a loss.

My teacher was right. I had no patience to nurture others, because I believed that serving others and sacrificing my reading time was a loss. I probably didn't articulate it quite like that, though, and can imagine eight-year-old me rolling my eyes and groaning, "Ugh. Do I *have* to?" There's an age-old adage that says, "The

world doesn't revolve around you." But from the day we are born until the day we die, that's the story we all prefer to live, isn't it?

The Real Story

If one of my children was about to be mauled by a bear, I would fight the bear without hesitating. That's how fiercely this mama bear loves her cubs. So why do I have to fight off feelings of selfishness when I discover that one of my kids ate the last piece of my birthday cake? It's funny (as in lame, not laughable) how to this day I still struggle with the same self-centeredness that I dealt with when I was an eight-year-old. That knowledge is a gift indeed. God has been so kind and patient toward me for all these years.

So why do we love the people in our lives with passion yet serve them with hesitation? There is a war going on inside us. The fairy tale has been exposed as a farce. We've been alive long enough to know the world doesn't revolve around us, but we sure do prefer the script that says we're the leading lady. If we're going to understand the mission of our motherhood, we need to know the *real* story.

The real story of my life is that I once was lost and now I'm found. God powerfully converted me as a freshman in university. He raised my lifeless soul from the dead, removed my heart of stone, and gave me a new heart of flesh that is prone to love him. Now, I must use precise words to communicate what really happened, for God converted me *to Christ*, not to an idea of "biblical womanhood." My salvation was not determined by *my* faithfulness to live out my God-given femininity but rather by *God's* faithfulness to save me through Christ's work on the cross. As we'll see later from Scripture, Jesus designed womanhood for himself, creating female image bearers in his likeness to faithfully follow him. I gladly affirm and celebrate God's design for women as he has communicated in his word. In my ethnically diverse church, I enjoy watching women from over seventy nationalities live out their God-given design and mission to nurture others. I can hear these friends from Redeemer

Church of Dubai all agree in their beautiful accents that there is no singular culture or solitary superwoman who embodies the godliest epitome of womanly perfection. Jesus Christ alone is the focus, hope, and help of every woman everywhere!

The Bible is full of truth that lands in the living rooms of ordinary people. So it is in that vein that I want to share a little bit more of where I'm coming from (besides my "you're fired" story from the third grade). My husband, Dave, is a man who loves the Lord and is committed to living out the mission Jesus has given him. When we were first married, we were young and strong; nothing could slow us down. In a lot of ways, I didn't need to exercise patience toward my husband or care for him sacrificially. We were quite capable of caring for ourselves, and at times I struggled to keep up with him! When we were both in seminary I was feverishly nervous about the idea of becoming a mother in the future. "We're going to wait five years," was the line my husband and I gave people when they asked about our family-growing plan.

However, five years approached quickly. As the time passed in increments of full course loads and a dozen short-term mission trips, my heart warmed to the idea of becoming a mother. I soon learned from an older woman in my life that my anxiety in this area was not excluded from the "1 Peter 5:7 Rule."³ We spent nearly two years "trying" before our first child was conceived, and every month I went through a cycle of mixed emotions: from hope, to disappointment, to relief. In those days God taught me a lot about his sovereignty and his kindness. Then, on the evening our first child was born, uncertainty hit me like a tsunami. As I finished feeding my daughter for the first time, the nurse nonchalantly reminded me, "All right, dear; now set your alarm to wake her in two hours to feed her again." *Again?* Exhausted like I had never been before, I could not compose any verbose or eloquent prayers. I simply needed daily bread: "Father, I have no idea what I'm doing. Give me *whatever it is that I need* to do what you've given me to do."

Now, years later, my lack of patience still appears in the way I love my husband who has developed a nerve disease and an accompanying physical handicap. My selfishness appears in the way I nurture my four young children. My self-centeredness appears in the way I relate to my friends at church and fulfill my commitment to love them as brothers and sisters in Christ. It appears in the way I pray for my neighbors and witness to them.

But. Praise the Lord! I don't have to hide behind the "I'm just too busy thinking about myself to serve others; you'll have to find somebody else" narrative. The gospel tells sinful, broken me that I'm actually part of a different story. *Jesus invites women to missional motherhood: to follow his pattern, to trust his promises, and to nurture others by the power he provides.* Jesus Christ is on a mission that he will most assuredly accomplish, and he invites us to participate to the praise of his glorious grace.

Very Vital Verbiage

Have you ever asked a temper-tantruming toddler to "use their words"? Me too. When we talk about theology and motherhood, we not only need to use our words; we need to use the right words. We need to be intentional when we use our words, especially words about who Jesus is and what he is doing. But we also need to be intentional when we use words for motherhood. When I say "mother," I want you to think of it as a verb too. When you read the word *nurture*, I want you to remember everything that it involves: discipling, serving, caregiving, mothering, teaching, showing hospitality, and more.

Mothering (or nurturing) is a calling not just for women who have biological or adopted children. Mothering is a calling for all women. Every Christian woman is called to the spiritual motherhood of making disciples of all nations. Our nurturing is, by nature, *missional*. In this book we'll see how our maternal instinct needs to be conformed to the shape of the cross, and how Jesus himself does this in our hearts from the inside out.

Maybe those words make the mantle of your many responsibilities feel a bit heavier: caring for an ailing parent, counseling a new friend at church, worrying about a wayward son, encouraging your weary husband, serving your suffering neighbor, or praying for a struggling missionary.

When I think about my role in nurturing those around me (and those neighbors who are on the other side of the world), I can feel my proud back being bent beyond its capacity. *Yes, Lord, break our pride and cultivate in us humble hearts as we sacrificially mother our children, minister to our friends, and reach the lost.*

Our faith needs to be strengthened with real hope—not fake hope. If you’re anything like me, you’ve already had enough taste tests of the fake stuff to know that you don’t have time for fake hope. All of the flimsy inspirations and fake hope the world offers can’t hold the weight of stress, fatigue, sin, labor pain, or grief. Fake hope can’t quell your fears while you sit in the waiting room while your loved one is in surgery. Fake hope can’t pick up your broken heart from the floor after you watch a video about abortion. Fake hope can’t stay the tide of death that creeps up on us and our loved ones the longer we live on this earth. Fake hope can’t look to the past *and* the future, praising Jesus. Fake hope can only make us look back and say things like, “How could I have been such a fool?” As we go through the big story of what God is doing in the world, it will become evident where our fake hopes lie. Be looking for these as you read, and ask the Lord to search your heart. I’m often surprised by the fake hopes I look to for comfort. Would the Lord thrill our hearts as we remember again and again that we need the never-disappointing, real hope of the gospel!

As we taste more and more of the real hope of the gospel, our appetite for fake hope will start to disappear. We need to remember that this kind of growing pain, while painful, is ultimately a *joy*. God creates each of our days with opportunities to be glad-hearted, life-giving, glory bearers. Only Christ is strong enough to

accomplish this work in and through us. Missional motherhood isn't an exercise in muscling up strength to do stuff for God. Missional motherhood is a walk of faith where the weak (that's *all* of us) must keep before them the scenic view of the cross.

So let's start walking together. We're going to find God's pattern for the missional mothering he has commissioned. And then we're going to hear good news about the Christ who fulfills all of God's promises. Have you heard the saying, "You've got to walk before you fly"? Well, we're going to fly before we walk. In part 1 we're going to fly high and fast over the old, old story. God's pattern will be revealed, and his promises will be given. There are so many threads in God's tapestry of redemptive history, and missional motherhood is only one of them. We're going to be watching the shadow of the cross loom large over the Old Testament. Then, in part 2, we'll walk at a slower pace, pausing to consider some details more closely.

There's no such thing as "just" a mom.



Despite the routine tasks and mundane to-do lists, motherhood is anything but insignificant. God has designed motherhood as part of his greater plan to draw people to himself—instilling all women, whether called to traditional mothering or not, with an eternal purpose in nurturing others.

In this book, Gloria Furman searches the Scriptures for the mission of God in motherhood. She opens our eyes to God's life-giving promises—promises intended to empower each and every woman as she makes disciples in her home, in her neighborhood, and around the world.

"May thousands of women accept Gloria's challenge to be used by God to transform lives for the glory of his kingdom in their homes and in their worlds."

BARBARA RAINEY, Cofounder, FamilyLife; mom of six; author, *Letters to My Daughters: The Art of Being a Wife*

"With Christ-centered clarity, Gloria shows that our Savior calls us to a grand, global mission to nurture his disciples for his glory. This book is for every redeemed woman whose mothering heart longs to nurture biological and spiritual children."

SUSAN HUNT, former Director of Women's Ministries, PCA; author, *Spiritual Mothering*

"With a firm grasp of the biblical narrative and a sharp focus on the mission of God, Gloria challenges us to see motherhood as it is—not just a high calling but a part of the mission of God. You'll be encouraged and challenged by this book!"

ED STETZER, President, LifeWay Research; author, *Subversive Kingdom*



GLORIA FURMAN is a wife, mother of four, cross-cultural worker, and writer. In 2008 her family moved to the Middle East to plant Redeemer Church of Dubai where her husband, Dave, serves as the pastor. She is the author of *Glimpses of Grace*, *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*, and *The Pastor's Wife*.

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