



# Motherhood Under the Cross

Devotions to keep your eyes  
fixed on Jesus in the midst of  
the challenges of raising children



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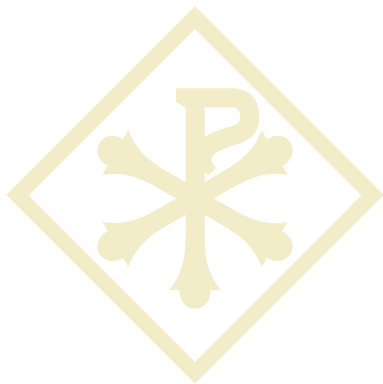
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**S**ometimes it feels like you are going it alone. Life can be hard. Mothering children is definitely hard. The authors of the devotions in this booklet know hard and they know Jesus. They have experienced the loneliness, the exhaustion and the fear about what the future will hold. They have felt isolated as they raised their children.

They wrote these words and picked out Scripture passages to help keep your eyes fixed on Jesus in the midst of the challenges of raising children. These authors are your Cloud of Witnesses (HEB. 12:1-2). You have others in your Cloud of Witnesses; go to church and meet them there.

The words in this booklet are written for you, anticipating the circumstances and emotions you might experience day in and day out. There are other very important words written for you. God gives you the Holy Scriptures, the very Word of God — the Bible — so that you can know His Son. We pray that reading these devotions increases your eagerness to be among the Church, receiving His Means of Grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments.







## A Lighted Path in Darkness

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).*

**I love the** first day of summer. That one day in June in the Northern Hemisphere yields abundant sunlight for 15 to 16 hours. I love to sit outside and feel the sun’s rays upon my face. I could bask in sunlight for hours. For people like me who love the longest day of the year, the winter solstice in December, the longest night of the year, can be discouraging, disheartening. The days are dark and cold. Three long months of darkness with minimal sunlight can seem like a very long time. I become impatient with my surroundings. On the darkest night of the year when the sun sets hours before I would like it to, I turn to Psalm 119 and read about God lighting our path. Ironically, this psalm that comforts me on the shortest day of the year is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses, yet to read it on the shortest day of the year is fitting and worthy of meditation.

Psalm 119 comforts me because God tells me (and you) about Jesus, who came to our broken and darkened world to save us. In Him there is no darkness. The psalm tells us that God’s words bring light. Jesus is that light, and Jesus Himself prayed the Psalm. He is unchanging, steadfast in His love for us, faithful to us, and righteous forever. When I read of His greatness and all that He does because He loves me, I am humbled in my smallness.

Verse 105 is a beloved verse to many: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. When darkness envelops us and we begin to despair, Jesus brings light to our tough days, our dark days. As mothers we experience the good and the bad in raising children. Happiness can quickly turn to disappointment, ease can soon become difficult, peace can turn to conflict, and comfort of the familiar can become unclear. But when we are weighed down with what seems like more of the bad than the good, Jesus lights our paths with each step we take. Though we know that in this life we will have trials, Psalm 119 tells us about the Father’s promise to send us a Savior, Jesus, who came into the world to lighten our lives filled with the murkiness of life’s struggles — the loneliness we feel at times, the despair of a situation, the sorrows in this

world, and the fear of what tomorrow may bring. Our heavenly Father sent us Jesus who walks alongside us with each step we take, illuminating what seems like a dark path. His Word gives clarity and brings hope to mothers whose lives often are chaotic. Jesus hears our prayers of anguish and suffering and never forsakes us. When our lives take unanticipated turns and change unexpectedly, we take comfort in knowing that Jesus never changes. He is loyal and faithful to us, gracious and merciful toward us. The Father of Lights has made His light to shine upon us (PSALM 118:27), and Jesus is that light.

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Dear Father of Lights, You are the light that blots out all darkness. When our paths seem dark amidst the struggles in our lives, grant Your Holy Spirit to guide us to Your Son, who never turns from us in our despair and sorrow. Help us to keep our eyes focused on Your Word that shines forth to illuminate our way, and comfort us with the truth of Scripture so that we are not disheartened in our afflictions. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## Do I Matter?

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44).*

**I’ve struggled with** this question my whole life, especially as I think about the people who’ve mattered to me. In particular, my two grandmas were great role models. I wanted to be a heroine to my family like both of my grandmas were to me. But after 23 years of being a mother, I am all too aware that I have been less than heroic — that I’ve let down my family, myself and most importantly, my Lord, by what I have done and by what I have failed to do. But I have a bold and audacious reason to hope despite my lacking.

My early childhood memories are of happy times bouncing back and forth between my grandparents’ homes. (My parents met because during their senior year of high school, my dad’s parents moved next door to my mom’s parents.) I admired my mom’s mother because she was a successful office manager, a rare thing for a female of her time. My dad’s mother was the funniest woman I’d ever met; she was totally involved in our lives, from keeping us with her on sick days, to making us amazing Halloween costumes. These women were my heroes, and I wanted to be like them when I grew up.

My maternal grandmother, Grandma Olivia, was baptized as a baby, raised in the faith, and left a legacy of Christian love to her family. At the age of 98, afflicted with dementia and needing full time care, she was a paragon of faith to me. She didn’t always recognize her family at the end, yet she was kind and sweet, utterly dependent on those around her. It was hard for me to see this woman who had always taken care of everyone exist in this humbled state. And yet, she knew the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the liturgy, even when she could do little more than move her lips. Her reason was gone but the faith given to her endured.

My paternal grandmother, Grandma Elsie, was baptized as a baby and was raised in the Christian faith, too. Her experience with Christianity was starkly different. Her older brother got his girlfriend pregnant and died soon after in

a tragic accident. Instead of being cared for by their church, her family was ostracized for her brother's sin, especially after her mother took in the child to raise. As a young girl, my grandmother experienced Christian people crossing the street to avoid walking near her and being contaminated by her family's sin. Because of this, Grandma Elsie left the faith as a teenage girl and never really came back. Yet she embodied unconditional love for me.

When I read the parable of the hidden treasure, I have hope for both my grandmas, for my children, and yes, even for me. You can have hope, too. Jesus is the man who sells all He has, indeed His very inheritance, to buy the field where you are buried just so He can reclaim you from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Our Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, humbled Himself to become man, suffer, and die in our place so that we might inherit His kingdom. Though you and I are declared dead and buried in our baptisms, that isn't the end of the story. The Son of God defeats death for us and gives us new life in Him (beginning in our baptisms and culminating when we meet Him face to face) in eternity.

The unkind people of my Grandma Elsie's childhood community didn't have the last word. Perhaps you, too, deal with cruelty from those who should show you grace. God wasn't finished with her as she struggled with her faith, and He isn't finished with you or your family either. He has the last word. He is faithful to His promises. He made an indelible mark on you in your baptism: you are His, and you bear his name. Dear sister in Christ, you are an heir with Christ! Not just now but throughout this life and into the next. Nothing compares to the inheritance He has for you and for your children. You don't need to be the heroine in the story, because you have Jesus, the One that joyfully gave up all He had for you. His inheritance is now yours. That is how much you matter to Him.

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Dear Lord, you gave your life for us and conquered death so that we may live eternally with you. When we are ostracized and shamed by others, grant us peace and help us to remember the inheritance promised to us, your beloved children. In Christ's name, Amen.



## Sleeping Like a Baby

*“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).*

**Y**ou’ve probably heard the phrase “sleeping like a baby.” If an adult says, “I slept like a baby last night,” they mean that they slept so peacefully, so quietly, without so much as a stir or startle. In fact, they probably slept so well that upon waking up, it felt like their head had just hit the pillow — like there was no lapse in time at all. Now **that** is a good night’s sleep! But is that your experience of how babies *actually* sleep?

As a new mom, I knew that there would be frequent night feedings and disrupted sleep. But what I was NOT expecting was for my sweet new baby boy to be so noisy, so fitful, so animated WHILE HE SLEPT! He grunted, groaned, kicked, squeaked, passed gas, and even opened and batted his eyes... all while sleeping! Come to find out, this is all very normal for babies during their sleep — it is actually part of the sleep cycle called “active sleep.” Ha! Who knew? It turns out that “sleeping like a baby” is an idiom full of false hope for a new mom like me. Let’s stick to “sleeping like a rock,” please. Rocks are quiet and still. That is the kind of sleep I want.

Sleep is hard to come by in the early days of motherhood. Even IF your baby is sleeping, it doesn’t mean that you are. The grunts, the groans, the kicks — this is enough to keep a momma awake. As my first baby has grown into a young boy and other babies have come, I’ve had yet another surprise — there are some nights where sleep is still hard to come by, even after the newborn phase has passed. There may be sickness, a bad dream, a sudden need for water in the middle of the night. And as kids grow, there are also more things that weigh on a mother’s mind, keeping her up at night... even when all the children are deep in peaceful slumber. How do I help him with his temper? What about that kid who was mean to her on the playground? Why did I lose my patience so quickly? Will how I handled that situation scar them for life? These questions play like a looping reel in my mind. What I’d give to “sleep like a baby,” even if I couldn’t “sleep like a rock!”

Our Lord never promises peaceful sleep for mothers or for our children. Some nights will be fitful, feverish or full of fear. But what He *does* promise is rest. Rest is a *place* of being more than a *state* of being. Rest is passive — something to receive rather than obtain. Isn't that good news for tired mommas like you and me?

So where is this rest and how do we receive it? Jesus IS rest, and where He is, there rest is found. We find Jesus in His Word. Rest in His Word. We find Jesus in church. Rest in the ark of His church. We find Jesus in the gifts He gives to us in Holy Communion. Rest in the sweet forgiveness of sins and the promise of salvation spoken to you. Even if sleep is relentlessly hard to come by, put yourself in places where your spiritual rest is a guarantee. Jesus calls us to come. HE is the place, and He is the provider.

True, sleep is important.

But true rest is needful.

When a good night's sleep isn't promised, go to the place where rest *is* a promise.

You must be weary, momma. Come, continue to rest a while.

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O Lord God, you are our resting place. We thank you that you care for us in both body and soul, and that you give us rest in ways that are most needful. Thank you for the gift of your Word, for your Word is living and active even as our bodies feel exhausted and worn down. Enliven us with your Spirit and sustain us with your Word. In the name of Christ, Amen.



## The God who Sees Me

*“So [Hagar] called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me” (Gen. 16:13).*

**H**agar, the bondservant of Abraham’s wife, Sarah, sat by the well, tired and confused. She had no idea where she was going but she knew what she was fleeing. Hagar was carrying Abraham’s child as Sarah had hoped she would, but seeing Hagar’s pregnancy, Sarah mistreated her and made her life miserable. Abraham had abandoned her to her vengeful mistress. And so Hagar ran away. She had no place in the world, no one to provide for her. Hagar thought she was unseen, unnoticed and abandoned, but it wasn’t true. God Himself saw her situation and appeared as the angel of the Lord. He came with guidance and the promise of His blessing and care for her. In her joy and wonder, she named Him “God of seeing.”

She called Him God of seeing because He noticed her. She hadn’t called out to Him, but He came looking for her. God called her by name and knew that she was Sarah’s bondservant. He gently questioned her and gave her guidance and purpose. After telling her to return to Sarah’s service, He promised that she would bear a son whom he would bless, providing Hagar with a future and a hope.

Your situation may be very similar to Hagar’s. You may feel abandoned with no one to notice your struggles or reach out a hand to help. But God has come to you just like He came to Hagar. He saw your brokenness and separation from Him, and He sent His Son Jesus to find you. His death on the cross forgave all your sins so that you could become His beloved daughter.

Not only did God see her, but Hagar saw Him. What a comfort that must have been. He was not far off in a blinding light or just a disembodied voice. He appeared as the angel of the Lord so she could see Him with her eyes and hear His words with her ears. God did that for you when He sent His only Son, Jesus, to become a human being with flesh and feelings, temptations and pain just like yours. Because He lived as a human being, He truly understands you.

Like Hagar, we want to see God, but where can we see the God who sees us? Jesus created the Church to be His body on earth, and that is where we can experience Him physically. We hear His words when the Scriptures are read and the pastor preaches. We see, touch, and taste our Lord as we eat and drink His body and blood in communion. And as we are joined to Him in the holy meal, we are also joined to all the other believers in the congregation. Through our brothers and sisters in Christ, we receive and give the love He shows to us.

Lastly, Hagar said that this God who sees is also the one who looks after her. She understood that God was caring for her in the midst of a difficult situation and that He would continue to do so. God told Hagar that she was pregnant with a son. He already had a name picked out for him, Ishmael, which means *God hears*. This son would give rise to a mighty nation. God tells Hagar to return to Sarah's service. He will care for her in the midst of her situation. He doesn't rescue her out of it but walks with her through it.

God is the one who cares for you, too. He gave the life of His son to forgive your sins and make you His own. Surely, He will give you everything else you need. You may still have to walk a difficult path, but God will always be with you and provide for you.

So dear Christian sister, know that your God sees you and all you are going through. He looks on you with compassion and love because you belong to Him in Christ. Go where you can see Him; attend a church where you can hear His word, receive Him in Holy Communion and give and receive His love with other Christians. Rest in His care for you. He is the God of seeing who looks after you.

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Heavenly Father, You know the difficulties we face, yet You always see us in our needs and take care of us. Grant us peace and patience during our trials and continue to watch over us as You watched over Hagar. In Christ's name, Amen.



## Worthy to Be Called God's

*"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 14:2).*

**M**any times, my evenings and weekends are spent alone. This loneliness can foster one of two states of mind for me. Either I can loathe feeling lonely and worthless, since my children are not with me, or I can use the quiet time to rediscover my worthiness according to God. Some people find their worthiness in accomplishments or in the ability to brag about any aspect of their life. When we don't feel worthy, we might fall into sinful thinking leading to despair. I found my worthiness, after years of despair, by looking to God, not to others, and not to my personal life. Deuteronomy 14:2 reminds us of this worthiness as the children of Israel moved out of Egyptian exile and into the wilderness. It states: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

Today, those words still apply to us. We are worthy as children of God due to Christ's death and resurrection for us. Worthiness does not come by what we accomplish in our life, but it comes from who we are in the eyes of God; His chosen children. As children of the Heavenly Father, bought and won by the precious body and blood of Christ, we receive the worthy benefit of eternal life. We are worthy because He chose us through the Holy Spirit and in our baptism — a baptism that cleansed us from all our unworthiness. The Holy Spirit gives us faith, but without that faith we are not worthy to be called His own. Hebrews 7:25 offers the confidence we need to know that Christ is our intercessor just for this reason: "Consequently, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

When we feel unworthy in the moment or in a given week or longer, remember that worthiness is much more than what we are here on earth. We are worthy because we are God's chosen children, ready to inherit the riches of heaven.

Seek Him first in the Word and the Sacraments and receive the worthy benefits of heaven and eternal life to come.

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Almighty Father, just like Adam and Eve were your worthy creation, and You never left them even after the fall into sin, help us to see our worthiness in our trying times. The body and blood of your only Son was shed to cleanse us from our unworthiness and the waters of Baptism offer us new life. May these gifts be ever present in our hearts and minds as we move about our days until we are called home to You. We are your worthy children, and we thank you for your gift of salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**For further reading:** Hebrews 7:25



## Time With God

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:16–18).*

**W**hen I am with my boys, there are times when an opportunity to spend a little more time with God presents itself. Sometimes these moments are humorous, when I am with my witty son. Other times the moments are serious, especially with my oldest son. My eldest son has some challenging health issues. When he first learned what was going on inside of him, he lamented with tears and anger, “Mom, this isn’t fair. I don’t want to have to deal with this as a child. Why did God do this to me?”

I, too, was just as confused and disappointed in this trying time, yet God provided the strength and words, and I simply said to my son, “God loves you and the sin of our world brings unexpected challenges to us. In time, you will understand how to manage this and move through this challenge, and then you might be able to help others, too. God has a plan for this.”

He looked at me and said, “Mom, I know, and I hope I can help others, but right now, can I just cry?” I replied, “Yes, let’s cry together and ask God to strengthen us as we await clarity in this.”

It has been two years now since that day, and my son recently shared with me that he barely realizes his health challenge anymore. It slows him down now and then, but he is okay with it. I was so moved by his ability to tell me he was okay now. Giving our time and concern to God and leaving it there helped us both heal over these past two years. I found joy and laughter in this recent moment as well. I couldn’t help but send a smile up to God. He had this all under control and we were good.

This recollection reminds me of Paul’s words in 1 Thess. 5:16–18: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

God’s time is not always ours, but the humor, the lessons, the joy that comes out of spending time with Him in our good moments and in our challenging

ones reap eternal benefits. We can turn to Him at any point, and He will hear us. He always has time for us, and He always answers “Yes, in Christ.” We, then, get to trust in His promises and relinquish our time to Him.

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Heavenly Father, You have given us time with You by providing the gifts of Word and Sacrament, which strengthen and sustain us each day. These gifts aid us to serve our children as moms of faith and to share in the love, hope, mercy and grace You offer to us during our difficult times. Be ever by our side as we walk alongside our children and help us be bearers of Christ’s image at times of unrest. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## Everlasting Love

*“But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments” (Psalm 103:17–18)*

**A**s a young girl I was pretty sure my father loved me. Once I was an adult, the ease of seeing his love became clearer and simpler. Then as a parent myself, I truly began to see his love. We live a ways apart now, but in the age of smartphones I often receive the same message from him every few nights: *“I love you very, very much and that will never, ever change.”* I might not be a young child anymore, but that hasn’t stopped my father from showing his love to me.

God’s love still supersedes an earthly parent’s love. The Father’s love is unconditional as He looks at His children through the sacrifice of His only Son. Knowing that we are loved unconditionally, the challenges of this life become easier to accept. Our sufferings offer hope as Paul shares in Romans 5:3–5a; “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.”

Just as my father reminds me of his love so often, so too God reminds us of His great love. Through our baptism, we have a seal even more powerful than parental love. In our baptism God’s love is poured out on us through the Holy Spirit (ROM. 5:5B). I reflect on this baptismal promise and love each night. It offers eternal peace that extends beyond our earthly life. As I recite the Lord’s Prayer and repent of my sins, I am comforted in knowing I have the Father’s unconditional love.

We are God’s children. He will always love us very, very much. I do what I can each and every day to remind my own two boys of my love for them, even though my love is still limited by human sin and is far from perfect. The love and trust I have in God enables me to share God’s unconditional love with them, and I am blessed to see them grow into strong young men with a

foundation on Christ. They have a promise from their heavenly Father that we are loved, and that will never, ever change. With such a promise we can start each day as forgiven children of God and rise from our bed into our baptismal promise. We have been called His own. We are forgiven and we are loved even in those trying times.

Find peace knowing you are a forgiven child of God. Take heart that God's love is steadfast and true as Psalm 103: 17–18 shares: “But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.” The seal of our baptism is the perfect confidence needed to guide us to the truth of our heavenly Father’s love. This love will bring us into His eternal glory forever.

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Almighty and Gracious Father, we know from the inspired writing of Your prophets that Your love for us is steadfast and everlasting. It is passed down from generation to generation through the sharing of the Word and the working of the Holy Spirit on our behalf. May we take this promise of steadfast love, shown by the sacrifice of Your only Son, and readily thank You for the grace and mercy You show us that covers our failings. Your unconditional love, Father, guides us to our eternal home through the body and blood of Christ. Help us to stay focused on these promises that start with our baptismal seal and extend to the outstretched arms of Your Son on the cross. In His humility, we gained everlasting life when He conquered death and rose from the dead to sit with You in heaven. We are Yours. We are loved. We are forgiven children. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## Adorn the Humility of Christ

*“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3–4).*

**A**s a mother, I found myself in utter despair one day, crying as I folded the two piles of laundry sitting around me. What was happening to my life? Why did it feel like it all was falling apart? Did my children have any idea how much I did for them? There was thanklessness surrounding my every action and I was tired of the day-to-day demands as a single mom. One evening I picked up my Bible looking for some sort of comfort in my chaos. I was suffering from a desire to feed my pridefulness and I knew the Bible would quiet that temptation.

As a Christian mom, my vocation of mother was to be centered around serving my children as Christ serves us, not on a need to be thanked for my calling at every step. Proverbs 11:2 states: “When pride comes then comes dishonor but with the humble is wisdom” and Proverbs 29:23 says, “One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.”

I forgot to put my trust in the Lord for strength, patience, and endurance; to offer thanksgiving for my children who were gifts from God and to thank God for entrusting me with their care. Pause a moment and think: *how many times have all of us forgotten to thank God during our trying times?* Raising kids is no easy task, but raising kids in the fear of the Lord reaps benefits beyond our understanding. Paul’s letter to the Philippians says it well. We should not quantify our interests with those of others in a selfish way. Christ died for us, and, in that action, He first humbled Himself to the lowest of servants, yet through all His sufferings He always served His neighbor, prayed to His heavenly Father and never backed away from His calling nor expected thanks or had any selfish ambitions.

In our lives, when pride begins to overtake us, repent, and then, like Jesus, we too can pause, pray and serve with His heart of humility and not a heart full of individualistic pride. Then take Paul’s words to the Philippians to heart

when he shares how we are to act in the interest of others, and show the love and care needed as Christian moms, daughters, sisters and earthly saints. Our humble glory will come in fullness when we meet Jesus face to face and live with Him in eternity! Take a moment on those selfish-pride-days to pause and thank God. Gather the children and pray with them regarding all the ways you are thankful for God's work and gifts in your lives. Then, with His help, turn away pride and be adorned in His humility, going forth and serving in your calling, as Christ did for you.

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Dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for His faithful service to your children. He never backed down from His service and was dutiful unto death, never seeking praise, but humbly serving for your children. Help us do the same in our service to our children and neighbors. Lead us to gladly serve without expectation of praise or thankfulness. May the Holy Spirit guide us in Your ways, O Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## Godly Sorrow Brings Joyful Promises

*“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.” (Hos. 6:1-3b).*

**B**edtime is a welcomed routine in my home, but one night that routine met resistance by my then 13-year-old son. He was not happy with my decision to take away his video games after he repeatedly disrespected me. I didn’t want to end the night in anger, but he wanted nothing to do with prayer time or my hug. I left his room and began crying. As a mother, I knew these days would come, but I never expected the deep sorrow and pain. There was no joy in taking his video games away, but he needed a break to examine his choices, to remember the Fourth Commandment. Instead, he raised a brick wall, shutting me out, not even wanting my words of forgiveness. That hurt, and I wasn’t sure what to do next. I was angry and sorrowful.

Jesus felt this same sorrowful pain. He also wept. Yet, he never sinned in either situation. Hosea reminds us that we will be torn down due to our sinful nature, but later there is hope if we know the Lord. When we approach God in confession of our sorrow and sin, we receive His promise of forgiveness and are made clean. Second Corinthians 7:9–10 reminds us that there is joy in repenting of our sin. Paul also shares that our earthly sorrows will bring death, but godly sorrow brings repentance and salvation, similar to the second part of Hosea’s verses. This repentance brings joy to our Father. Coming to the foot of the cross with our sorrow and sin and asking for God to help see us through is the godly sorrow and confession we should have. Jesus stated in John 15:10–11, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” Jesus wants us to abide in Him so our joy in Him is complete through our repentance and faith in Him, given by the Holy Spirit.

If we entrust ourselves to God and let our sorrows be His, let our thoughts be replaced with His thoughts, then we will begin to see the light, we will begin to know the Lord and His promises. And that's what I did that night. I prayed and lamented and reached out to God for healing and wisdom. No, we can't completely eliminate sorrows. But His plan is to save us, even when all seems lost. That is our hope! We may weep now, but when we are called home, we will glorify our Savior for eternity and there will be no more tears. There are no permanent sorrows with our Lord, just promises of hope that leads to eternal joy. In life's tougher moments I recommend singing *LSB* hymn 818, which reminds us that: "In thee is gladness, amidst all sadness."

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Dear Heavenly Father, Creation was once filled with Your glory, but since the fall there is sorrow all around us. It is in Christ's sorrows that we see a glimmer of hope of what is to come; the joy in our eternal salvation. Help us accept our sorrows, seeing Jesus' suffering in them, and keep us from turning away from You. May we seek the promises You offer in Your Word and Sacrament when we struggle with the disappointments of the sinful world around us. Surround us with the members of Your body, our family and friends in Christ, to work through our sorrowful days. Through Your Son we have hope for a future with You filled with eternal joy and gladness. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.



## Weakness

*“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:5–10).*

**W**eakness. What a difficult thing to grapple with. In a world that often encourages and celebrates strength, it can be so difficult to admit weakness. Sometimes seen as synonymous with having fallen short, weakness is largely known as something to run from or that should be avoided at all costs. This can cause us to feel like we’ve done something wrong or that we’re alienated when we experience our own weakness.

The reality is, though, that everyone is weak. And that is not a shortcoming. We have done nothing wrong by having earthly weaknesses. It is not a sin to not be capable of all things. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But, in this passage from 2 Corinthians, we are reassured that in our weakness we are strong in the Lord.

Mothers have a unique perspective on weakness. When we labor to bring our babies into our arms, we may feel completely weak. We push ourselves; we experience things we never have before. Of course, it takes strength to have a baby, but at the end of the day we have no control over what happens. We have to trust completely that God’s will be done for us and our child. Neither delivery nor admitting weakness comes easily to our sinful selves.

Our gracious God fulfills every weakness we may have. His strength is showcased through them. Because we are weak, we need Him. How else could we lean on His strength? So, like Paul, we can rejoice all the more when we are reminded of our weakness, for it is a reminder of the salvation we have received through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

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Heavenly Father, who is full of grace and strength, as your humble children we ask that You continue to be gracious to us in our weakness. Help us to not forget that it is Your strength that sustains us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.



## Loneliness

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matt. 1:23).*

**T**hey say **once** you’re a mother you’re never truly alone again. Regardless of which stage of parenting you may be going through right now, your child will always rely on you in some way or another. It is ironic, then, that motherhood can also feel so isolating and lonely. When your child cries in the night and only wants you to soothe them, when your toddler skins their knee and only mom’s kiss can fix it, when the school-aged child encounters teasing or bad grades and only your reassurance encourages them, and when the teenager has their first heartbreak, mom’s consistent love is the safe landing space.

Our children are truly a blessing from the Lord, and it is an honor to watch them grow, but that doesn’t mean we won’t be without those lonely moments. However, in those moments we are never truly alone. In Matt. 1:23 we are told that Jesus’ very name Immanuel means “God with us.” He is with us. The book of Matthew begins with this assurance and ends with it in Matt. 28:20. It says, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Throughout all of scripture we are continually reminded that our God does not leave us to be lonely:

In Psalm 23: “I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

In Isaiah 43: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.”

In Hebrews 13: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Even when Jesus was leaving the earth, preparing to ascend back to heaven, He left with assurance that we are not alone:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little

while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:16–21)

Jesus knew a bit about loneliness. He was left alone by His disciples on Good Friday as He traveled to the cross, and on the cross for our sake He was abandoned by His Father. He did all this for our sake. He endured the cross so that we might never know true abandonment. We do not have a Lord who doesn’t understand our pain, and He will never leave us nor forsake us.

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Dear Lord, Your Word encourages us and comforts us, and we know that You never abandon us. Walk alongside us as we raise our children and fulfill our vocation as mothers. In Christ’s name, Amen.



## Engraved on His Hands

*“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted. But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?*

*Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:13–16).*

**S**ometimes our lives seem so small, and our burdens so big. Sometimes it can seem like no one else is even aware of the ongoing struggles that sap our strength. Does anyone even notice or care?

In Isaiah 49:14, God’s people feel abandoned in their struggle. We hear them cry out with passion, *“The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”*

There are moments in life when we, too, may cry out in complaint to Him. It may seem true to any of us that we are so alone in our suffering that even God must have forgotten us.

But things are not always what they seem. In verse 15, God gives us a glimpse into what this bleak situation looks like from His perspective. He poses the question, *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?”*

Oh. So, God knows what that feels like. And while we feel utterly alone, that is how deeply He is moved in response to our needs.

Even if a nursing mother momentarily forgets her child’s hunger, or even if she intentionally tries not to hear the child’s cries, her own body would constantly remind her that she has the nourishment her child needs. Her body would be physically moved by the needs of her suffering child and will not let her forget.

This is the connection God chooses to describe His ongoing presence with us and His never-failing compassion when all we feel is our need. When we feel our need, He feels our need, too.

But that's not all. Even if all these nursing mothers were to forget their children, God says, "...yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (ISAIAH 49:15-16). Wow.

There, on the pierced hands of our Savior who sacrificed Himself for us, we are constantly brought to mind. It is because He knows our greatest needs so intimately that he defeated sin, death, and the devil for us on the cross.

And our Savior knows the struggles that still sap our strength. He knows what it is to be lonely, exasperated, exhausted and abandoned. He even cried out in His own complaint on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (MATT. 27:46) He knows our needs and we can be confident He is with us already, responding to our cries for help with the mercy and grace we need.

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Dear God, You know our struggles better than we do. When we feel our needs, we can be sure that You feel them, too. Help us confidently call out to You for all we need. Give us Your mercy and grace to help in our time of need. And help us to trust You even when we can't see what You see. In Jesus' name, Amen.



# God's Math

*Psalm 121*

**T**he math just didn't add up. Folding laundry with my two older children should have resulted in neatly piled clothes in just a few minutes. But when I looked around to evaluate our progress, it was messier than when we started. I had neglected to calculate my one-year-old's ability to unfold and scatter laundry faster than three of us could fold. I took a deep breath.

So many things in our lives seemed to involve the same math. And it wasn't just household chores. Keeping up with work, kids' behavior, relationships... everywhere I looked it seemed like there was more working against me than for me. Where could I possibly look for relief?

I was finally asking the right question, a question that would also be the answer to the math stacked against me. Psalm 121 begins with a similar question, "From where does my help come?" Whether we realize we need help suddenly in a situation that overwhelms us completely unaware or one that builds slowly over time, a moment comes when you suddenly realize everything you are doing to maintain control is outnumbered by what's working against you.

But in Psalm 121 asking the right question leads to the right answer, "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Here is where the math changes. All of the math in all of creation pales in comparison when our Helper is the Lord who made it all. I don't even need to add it up anymore, the words of the psalm do it for me. The Lord simply will not let my foot be moved. He, my Helper, will not sleep. He is my Keeper who keeps me from evil. He keeps my life, my comings and goings, forever. When I ask the right question, "From where does my Help come?" the math is forever in my favor.

The Lord our Helper outnumbers all that can be against us. Even our greatest needs, rescue from sin, death, and the devil, were not too much for Him and His love for us. Romans 8:32 asks a follow up question, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" That is some really big math in our favor. We

can count on our Helper to keep us as we come and go, “from this time forth and forevermore” (PSALM 121:8).

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Dear Heavenly Father, You know more intimately than we do our need for help, and You’ve already provided what we need most in the suffering, death and resurrection of Your Son for us. When we feel outnumbered by all that is against us, remind us that our Help comes from You. Thank you for your ongoing watchful keeping of our lives. Thank you for providing mercy and grace that is more than sufficient to outnumber what’s against us. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.



# They Shall Not Overwhelm You

*Isaiah 43:1–7*

**W**hen I was six years old, a winter with record snowfall was followed by a spring with record flooding. As I stepped off the school bus with my older brother, nothing but the road the bus was on was above water. I remember seeing the current push sticks and debris past us, more than covering the normally dry, stone path to our house.

My brother and I tried to walk straight to the house as the moving water pulled us to the left. I could feel the water pulling on my legs as my feet struggled with slippery footing. I could picture what could happen if the water managed to sweep me off my feet, and so with my brother's strong grip steadying my arm I focused my gaze on the door to my house. I was so thankful I was not alone, and that the waters that could have swept me away were not overwhelming for my big brother.

God knows that we sometimes face situations that we cannot avoid and that threaten to consume us if we stand alone. He knows how we can be flooded with rushes of fear or waves of anger that threaten to overwhelm us. He knows how waters of bitterness can slowly rise and poison us. And He knows how the weight of facing challenges that just won't go away can wash away our resolve and sap our strength.

In Isaiah 43:1–7, God reminds us that we do not face these things alone. None of the enemies you find in those floodwaters will be able to strip you away from Him. There is no ransom He would not pay to redeem you. There is no danger you can face that He will not overcome for you.

God describes His steadfast love for you like this:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (ISAIAH 43:1).

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you” (ISAIAH 43:2).

“For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (ISAIAH 43:3).

“...you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.” (ISAIAH 43:4).

Seeing our overwhelming need, God sent Jesus to die on a cross and rise from the dead, defeating sin, death, and the devil for us. God called us by name in the waters of Baptism and we are His forever. Even in the challenges we face in this life, we don't need to fear. We are not and will never be alone, because He is with us.

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Dear God, thank you for always being with us, now and forever. Help us to remember how much You love us. Help us also to remember that you have already defeated our greatest enemies for us: sin, death and the devil. When our circumstances seem overwhelming, help us to trust in Your even-stronger presence and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## Expectations versus Reality

*“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6).*

**A**s moms, we sometimes get caught up in listening to others’ opinions and try to live up to their expectations of us. We get discouraged when someone innocently gives us parenting advice and offers, “If I were you, I would...” and “Why don’t you just....?” Though it may be good and loving advice, we too often internalize it as, “I’m not living up to my vocation as mother,” and “I have to do better.” People want perfection from moms. They even expect it. We as moms want to be perfect, too, and in our own sinfulness we find it difficult to look in the mirror every day and admit that we aren’t perfect, and no matter what we do, we never will be. That is a reality check for each of us. Why do we spend so much time looking to others’ advice and reactions and search for perfection? We get too caught up in society’s ideals and our own checklists, comparing ourselves to other moms to see if we measure up to unattainable standards, and we become frustrated and exhausted.

How flawed are our thoughts, and how great our despair. We can never find worth by our own doing or in trying to please others. In Christ lies our hope and our perfection. He came as perfect man to make us perfect in him. Only in Jesus, who has redeemed us through his blood on the cross, are we made perfect. He both declares us righteous and gives His Holy Spirit who perfects and completes us in Him — not by our own merits and anything we do as moms, not by trying to live up to others’ expectations of us, but through Christ alone and what he daily does for us. In him we find our worth as moms. Through the waters of Baptism, through Confession and Absolution, and through the Lord’s Supper we are made anew and being brought to completion, and that completion will be perfect indeed.

Never doubt that the Holy Spirit is daily working faith in our hearts, perfecting us for our eternal home where we will find rest from expectations and advice that many times weigh heavy on our hearts. Sometimes thoughts of eternity are hard to think about when we are caught up in life’s struggles and the *here*

*and now*, but even then, Jesus gives us grace to get through each day, walking alongside us every step of the way as we fulfill our vocation as imperfect moms. Jesus *is* with us every day and will never forsake us. This is a promise and a truth you can cling to always.

In a world where people want to see perfection from us, Christ invites us to do the opposite and to lay our imperfections at the foot of the cross, receiving the forgiveness of sins and freedom from the weight of this world. That is the most awesome reality for each of us. We are refreshed through the Sacraments and can go to him in prayer, day or night, and lay our burdens, our troubles and our failures as moms on him. In Jesus there is peace and respite, and the unfulfilled perfection in this world that we seek will be completed and perfected in Him, and in Him alone.

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Dear Lord, you know our shortcomings and failures, and you invite us to confess them to you. Forgive us our sins and grant us your grace as we lay our imperfections at the foot of your cross. Bestow upon all mothers the peace that only comes from you. In your holy name we pray, Amen.



## All That Glitters Is Not Gold

*“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain” (Phil. 2:14–16).*

**L**et's be honest about motherhood. Motherhood is messy. There, I said it. Sometimes babies and kids are just plain gross. I'm a clean freak and a germaphobe. Everything about caring for little ones rubs against my inner urge to keep things tidy and virus-free. But babies have blow-outs. Toddlers tumble and cheerios get tossed. There's spit-up, potty training, bibs covered in sweet potato. There's constant laundry, a continuous pile of dishes and bottles to be cleaned, toys strewn about from one end of the house to the other. We could be here all day naming all the ways being a mom brings a new level of mess to our lives.

Motherhood is monotonous. Whether you're a stay-at-home mom or you commute to work every day, your routine in the early years of raising children often remains the same, looks the same, and feels the same. Wake, feed, diaper, dress. Repeat. It's doing a lot of little things for little people who can't do anything for themselves. Over and over again, day after day.

Along with this, motherhood can feel mundane. Prior to having your first baby, you probably had the freedom and flexibility to add some kind of excitement to your day if you really wanted to. Now, an “exciting day” needs to be planned out and prepped for. There are diapers to pack, water bottles to fill, one last sit on the potty before leaving the house for an outing. Where's the excitement if you can't be spontaneous? Isn't “variety the spice of life?” Why do my days feel so...ordinary? Answer: because they usually are.

But ordinary doesn't mean meaningless. Monotony doesn't mean insignificant. And messy doesn't mean...well wait, as long as we're being honest, messy still means messy.

On the surface, motherhood certainly isn't glamorous. Many in our culture today look at the prospect of motherhood in disgust, often because of the list above. But what's under the surface? Maybe we can find the hidden gem.

Sisters, don't listen to the lies that rob motherhood of its sparkle and shine. Sure, this may be your fifth day in a row of using dry shampoo. True, you're probably disheartened by picking up the same toys from the same places, day after day. And quite possibly you're frustrated that the only kind of spice you can add to your life right now is relegated to your literal spice rack.

You know what sparkles and shines like no other? It's a mother who cares for her children with the tender mercy of Christ. It's the mother who, no matter how dull her day may feel, carries on her faithful work with love for her family. It's the mother who daily dies to self and puts her children's needs above her own, even and especially when that means sacrificing excitement for duty, self for others. It's the mother who clings to the forgiveness of Christ for herself and then extends that same forgiveness to her children. Motherhood, it turns out, is chock full of meaning. The tasks may be ordinary, but the role itself is not. In fact, I can't think of anything more extraordinary than the work of a mother.

There may be a temptation to grumble (refer to the initial list). All mothers certainly have legitimate reasons if they decided to gripe. But our Lord, through the words of St. Paul to the Philippians, urges us to not go down that path. You are a child of God, after all. You shine when you boast in what God has given you to do! You're brighter than the stars of His great creation when you remain faithful to the task at hand. You were given a tall order when you were given the gift of raising your child. **You're doing good work, momma!** And hey, while you're at it with this business of being faithful to His calling, don't hesitate to find some family fun in there, too! Sure, strive for shiny pots and pans. But more importantly, strive for the shine of a woman who knows her worth and finds joy in serving her little ones.

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Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessing of motherhood. Help us to find joy in this vocation, even in the humblest moments of service. We praise you for providing all we need in every moment and every day. In Your Name, Amen.



## Father to the Fatherless

*“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land” (Psalm 68:5–6).*

**I**n the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray to God as our Father in heaven. This can be a difficult concept for many people, especially if they have conflicted relationships with their own fathers or other men who failed in their duties as fathers. This struggle is not unique to our present age, as sins’ various manifestations have infected this world since the Garden of Eden. Women in Jesus’ day certainly faced the realities of abandonment by men, which made their social and economic situation even bleaker than it would be today. When Jesus invites His disciples to pray to God as their Father, He is not being insensitive to these struggles by pouring salt on a wound; rather He’s asking us to envision God as our perfect, loving Father.

Luther states in his explanation of the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer that the words ‘Our Father who art in heaven’ (MATT. 6:9) mean that “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.” Did you see those words ‘tenderly invites?’ Our Father is not a father who bullies into submission but invites His true children to recognize that His loving fatherhood provides, nourishes, protects, and hears the needs of His children. This is why the psalmist can pray that our God is the God of the fatherless.

Psalm 68:5–6 provides a couple different examples of people in vulnerable situations: the fatherless; widows; the solitary; and the prisoners. These examples are not merely abstractions meant to tell you something about the character of God, though they certainly are at least that. They also tell us something about how our loving Father sees and responds to the catastrophes we each face in our own lives. To those who do not have a father, for whatever reason, He is their Father. To those without a husband, left single through death or abandonment, He is their protector. To those without a family and home He

provides a resting place. Those who rebel against His Word are left to struggle in a drought-riddled land, while the faithful captives will be led to prosperity.

As we struggle over a social or economic situation that is daunting and precarious or worry about the judgmental glances of others as we try to find true community, or as we worry whether we are truly known or seen, we can be assured that our troubles are seen and known. You are seen and known. Your children are seen and known. We are seen and deeply known by God our Father, who is the measurement of all earthly Fathers.

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Dear heavenly Father, You are our perfect, loving protector who never abandons us. We come to You in bold confidence and ask You to continue to provide for all our needs this day and always. Nourish us with Your Word so that we may humbly pray to You as You so lovingly invite us to do. In your Son's name, Amen.



## Shared Burdens

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30)*

**M**otherhood is a demanding vocation that can create many burdens. Yes, I know that everyone from the devotionals to the Christian influencers will be careful to emphasize the blessings of motherhood as illustrated with curated images of perfect children, homes, lives, and so on. Yes, motherhood is a blessing, but goodness it is also hard. This hardship and sacrifice are felt in our bodies that are forever altered by it, by our minds that worry and problem solve under the shroud of sleep deprivation, and our souls that can struggle to find peace and solace in the midst of the worry and weariness.

Jesus comes to us with an answer to all our weariness. By speaking to the pervasive weariness that marks life in our fallen world, He also brings a warming comfort to the specific weariness that can plague mothers. Does the weight of it all feel too much? Are you worried about your children and how to raise them well? Do you worry about the sort of world they will grow up in? Do you worry that you just don’t have enough in your emotional tank to make it through the week? Does it seem like you’re carrying all your burdens alone? Jesus promises here to give us rest if we simply go to Him. How do we go to Jesus? Go where He has promised to be found — church. Gather together with the saints, the family of God, to receive Jesus’ words of absolution for the sins you have committed and know that you are a forgiven child of God; receive Jesus’ body and blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins; listen to His Word preached to you. Rest in that forgiveness, as that is rest for your body and your soul.

I know it can be difficult to receive these gifts and even grasp fully what they are when you’re wrangling children by yourself or self-conscious about the judgement of others, but in church we do not receive the gifts of Jesus in isolation. We receive them in community, within the household of God. We

receive these gifts with fellow sinners redeemed by Jesus, who know what it is to feel helpless, burdened and alone. This is why we all gather around the One who promises us peace. Ask your sisters in Christ for help, as so often there is a grandmother missing her grandchildren who would be happy to sit with you, or another mother who also struggled in some of the ways you are struggling. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. Christianity is a religion for the weak and for the vulnerable, as in our weakness we are made strong in Christ (2 COR. 12:9), who is the Savior crucified for you.

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Dear Lord, You are the One who is the great bearer of all burdens. Give us Your peace as we struggle with the challenges of motherhood. Continue to give us loving Christians who help us to carry our burdens. Make us ever grateful for Your gifts and the family we find in the Church that You established for us. In Christ's name, Amen.



# The Lord is My Shepherd

*Psalm 23*

**N**o matter what stage of life we are in, loneliness afflicts us at times and brings great sadness. The feeling can be all-consuming. Mothers know loneliness a lot. Sometimes we feel lonely because we are isolated from others and spend all day without having conversations with adults. Sometimes we feel lonely because we look out the window and see our neighbors going off to work, and we think how wonderful it would be to live in the “working world.”

Sometimes we feel lonely because we have to go off to work and separate from our child. Sometimes we feel lonely because we see other mothers who have lots of support from extended family when we have none at all. Sometimes we feel lonely because we think that no other mother struggles with what we do.

Psalm 23 is comforting for a mother to read when loneliness envelops her. Jesus walks alongside you every step of the way. You are never truly alone because Jesus is with you through every trial and through every emotion you feel. You can trust in Jesus as David trusted in the Lord to guide him. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* He is your loving shepherd who never abandons you in your loneliness. Jesus wants to fulfill every void in your life. In Him you have no want. He knows your needs and hears your prayers. *He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.* Jesus cares for you and guides you to peace. He is merciful and loves you. *He restores my soul...* God’s Word refreshes and restores you so that you can withstand another day. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...* We belong to Jesus. He has claimed us in the waters of baptism. No test that you endure will separate you from your shepherd. *Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies...* The devil may make you think you are alone and have no one in whom to take refuge, but Jesus never forsakes us, and He has prepared a banquet for you in His heavenly kingdom that will be like no other. *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life...* You have been buried and raised with Him, and so nothing can separate you from His love. He has prepared

a place for you where there is no loneliness. Rest assured in Jesus' promise as He abides with you. He gives rest to your weary soul. He is the good shepherd who loves you so.

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Dear Jesus, You are our Good Shepherd who fills every void in our lives. Abide with us when we are afflicted with loneliness and sadness. Calm us when the rough waters begin to overtake us. Give rest to our weary souls when fatigue overwhelms us. In Your precious name, Amen.



# God's in Control

*Ephesians 1*

**A**s mothers we tend to be planners. We schedule the appointments, monitor clothing sizes, try to keep up with the ever-changing toddler food preferences, middle school sports practices and eventually assisting high schoolers with beginning to plan their own futures. From the moment we find out we're going to have a baby we are thrust into a world of decisions and plans to be made.

God blesses us, as mothers, to have the ability to do these things. He gives us skills to care for our families. However, this can be a slippery slope, an easy spot in our lives for Satan to gain a foothold and let in anxieties. We may begin to be under the false impression that we are in control, that our decisions hold a greater power in the world than we have actually been given.

In Ephesians 1 it says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (EPH. 1:3-14).

Our God has already made the ultimate plan. He has made us His children. As mothers we have a unique understanding of what this means, and even the most love that we can comprehend for our children doesn't compare to God's — He still loves us even more than this. He made the ultimate decision in sending His Son to die on the cross and rise again in order to forgive each of our sins.

Now this is not to say that because God has power over all that we can shirk our responsibilities; we have been blessed with children to care for; He has given us the vocation of mother to do to the best of our abilities. We can, however, rest in the knowledge that it's not solely up to us. God is there to care and protect, our responsibility is to point our children to Him and all He has done and trust that He will keep them in His care. Even when we may make the wrong choice, nothing can separate us from Him through Jesus Christ our Savior.

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Heavenly Father, in Your great love You have planned for us to be Your dear children for eternity. Bless us in our vocation as we love and teach our children about Your Son's plan for us. Grant us patience during trying times when our lives seem unmanageable. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## God with Us

*“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).*

**I** have a calendar hanging on the wall that has photos from artist Joe Castillo, who creates Christian images. When you look closer at the images, you can see many smaller images in the works. One is the Christmas story. From afar the drawing appears to be of Mary, but if you take a closer look, you can see scenes from Jesus’ birth embedded in the drawing of her. The angel Gabriel is depicted in her head covering, the city of Bethlehem is drawn in her hair, and other figures from Scripture — the wise men, the shepherds and Simeon — are also in the drawing. Without carefully inspecting it, the details in the drawing of Mary would be missed. There is so much more in the drawing than what one sees at first glance, and the details are hidden from us from afar until we look closer.

Finding God in our lives may *seem* similar to looking at these drawings on my calendar. When we struggle, we may feel alone and think that God hides Himself from us. We may think that He is far from us and not close enough to know all our trials and understand our heartaches. We may think that the details that weigh us down in our lives may be trivial to God and unseen to Him. We wonder if God is listening to our prayers and watching over us. We wonder if He has abandoned us. We wonder if He will give us a solution to tomorrow’s problem that we worry about today. We feel despair and wonder, “Does God *really* love me? Is it *really* true that He has not forsaken me? Is He *really* walking beside me?”

The answer is a resounding *yes*. He *really* loves us that much. The drawing of Mary in the calendar on the wall is a beautiful drawing of Jesus’ birth, but it is much more than a pretty picture that draws us in. It is a picture of the incarnation and a promise. God has revealed His story of salvation given to me and to *you*. He has not hidden this good news from us, and when we are not far from His Word but read and ponder it so that we are closer to it, we learn about His plan for us and that He is with us always. The Christmas story in Matthew tells us that Jesus alone came to deliver us from our sins. He came

long ago, humbling Himself to live in a fallen world to save all mankind, and He comes to us today to share in our sufferings. He is not afar but close, and Jesus knows every detail in our troubled lives just as He counts every hair on our heads. He comes to reach out to us and draw us closer to him.

Our Lord does not hide himself from us like the hidden pictures on my calendar. We have Scripture to tell us of God's promises for me and for *you*. Jesus comes to us because He loves us. From the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel where we read that Immanuel is with us, to the last chapter of Matthew (28:20) where our Savior tells us: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age," God is ever present in our lives. He is in the Church He established, and with us in Word and visible, not hidden, Sacraments. When we fall short and fail to remember that God is with us, we remember that Immanuel *is* indeed with us, offering the forgiveness of sins, drawing us closer to Him, walking with us in our trials and comforting us.

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Dear Lord, in Your gracious love for us You promise to be with us until the end of the age. You know all the details of our lives and are always with us. Forgive us when we fail to acknowledge Your presence and think that You don't share in our sufferings. Comfort us when we are weighed down by life's trials. In Your name, Amen.



## Perseverance

*“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16–18).*

**A** day as a mother can feel like it will never end. That might be a little overly dramatic. But then maybe not. Have you felt like that? Have you wished for children’s voices to be quiet, bedtime to come soon, to have time to yourself without being responsible for your child?

Have you ever encountered a well-meaning older woman who wistfully smiles and sighs...

“They grow up so fast; cherish the time while they are little?”

“The days are long, but the years are short.”

“It’s a marathon, not a sprint.”

So many phrases are meant to encourage mothers and help them take a long view of parenting. But, meanwhile, you are feeling discouraged, depleted or even defeated. You don’t need platitudes; you need the Gospel. You need to be reminded that the triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — claims you in baptism. He hears your confession and forgives your sin. He renews you each and every day, giving you comfort, strength and forgiveness.

This renewal in the Gospel is what enables moms to persevere for all of the challenges that come up in parenting and all of life in this fallen world. Only God can carry us through the seemingly never-ending days. His promise to you is this: “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (MATT. 28:20).

All of these outward things in this life, the circumstances we find ourselves in and all the things we see around us, are wasting away and will one day come

to an end. Instead of counting on things of the world during challenges, we persevere through the afflictions by looking to our unseen, eternal God. God's Son, Jesus Christ, who was sent to bear all sin, carry it to the cross, suffer, die, rise again and ascend into heaven is within you in the midst of your struggles and afflictions. He is present to forgive sin, comfort you and strengthen you for each day. That same Jesus Christ will return one day and set everything right for all eternity.

So do not lose heart. Instead, rest in the forgiveness and strength that are yours in Christ Jesus. He promises to be with you for this long day, and for all the other long days; and Christ always keeps His promises.

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Lord God, Heavenly Father, You have called us to be Your children and have called us also to be mothers. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. Grant us strength and peace for each and every struggle that awaits us this day. Remind us of your love in Christ and help us persevere through the difficulties. Forgive us when we fail in our callings, both as mothers and as Your children. By Your Word and Spirit, pour out Your comfort and peace upon us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen.

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