



KATIE FARIS

FOREWORD BY MEGAN HILL

*Gospel Hope & Comfort for the
Unexpected Sorrows of Motherhood*

“This book is a lifeline for every mom who has ever felt alienated by the advice to ‘savor the season’ or defeated by the encouragement to ‘enjoy every moment’ of raising her kids—whether because of hard diagnoses, neurodiversity, complicated births, illness, loss, or just the average Tuesday. With gentleness and vulnerability, Katie Faris not only offers suffering mothers validation and permission to grieve their hardships but she also equips them to see their circumstances through the lens of Scripture, renewing their hope and confidence in God’s goodness to them even and especially within the suffering with which they have been entrusted.”

Abbey Wedgeworth, mom of three; author, *Held: 31 Biblical Reflections on God’s Comfort and Care in the Sorrow of Miscarriage*

“Katie Faris shows us that parenting is not a pain-free experience, nor should that be our goal; it is a deep dependency on Christ. His strength is made perfect in weakness, and he is forming us through our grief and painful parenting experiences. Be encouraged: the gospel does indeed offer hope, comfort, and purpose in our journey.”

Julie E. Lowe, Counselor and Faculty Member, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

“When the gift of motherhood is overshadowed by the grief of motherhood, we need a solid place to set our hope. Katie Faris helps us honestly engage our sorrows and points us to the only one who is enough to sustain and comfort us through them. If the trials of motherhood are overwhelming you and the heartache feels too heavy to bear, this book will be a balm to your weary heart, reminding you that God is still—and always will be—good. Read and find refuge in him.”

Amy DiMarcangelo, author, *A Hunger for More: Finding Satisfaction in Jesus When the Good Life Doesn’t Fill You*

“*God Is Still Good* helps moms to remember what our sorrows can help us to forget: we’re neither alone nor without hope in Christ. In this book, Katie Faris serves readers as a conduit of God’s comfort—a sympathetic sister who, as a result of her own painful trials in motherhood, has learned to lean on sustaining grace in the midst of desperation, grief, and disappointment. If you’re a weary mother in need of encouragement—wondering how you’re going to make it through the troubles of today—then the practical wisdom in this book is especially for you.”

Christine Chappell, author, *Help! My Teen Is Depressed* and *Help! I’ve Been Diagnosed with a Mental Disorder*; Host, *Hope + Help Podcast*; certified biblical counselor

God Is Still Good

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God Is Still Good

*Gospel Hope and Comfort for the
Unexpected Sorrows of Motherhood*

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Foreword by Megan Hill

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*This book is for all those who walk on
harrowing paths related to motherhood—
but especially my parents.*

“So we do not lose heart. . . .

*For this light momentary affliction is preparing
for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”*

2 Corinthians 4:16–17

Foreword

Megan Hill

EVERY THURSDAY MORNING, a group of moms meets at our church. We call it “playgroup,” as if it were for the good of the children, but really it’s for the moms. It’s our chance to laugh, to drink coffee, to share stories. The night before, we text one another a reminder: “Playgroup tomorrow, 10 a.m. See you there!” But when Thursday morning comes, we are never all there on time. One by one, long past ten, we each straggle in, explanations on our lips.

“I was all set to walk out the door, but my youngest tripped on the stairs.”

“I would have been here earlier, but I had to run my teenager’s lunch to the school.”

“This was the week I was going to be on time, but the two-year-old decided not to sleep last night.”

We offer these excuses as if the situations were unexpected, but this week’s disruption is basically the same as last week’s. If it’s not a forgotten lunch box, it’s lost gym clothes. If it’s not a

bruised knee, it's spilled Cheerios. If it's not nightmares, it's temper tantrums. Truly, it's always something.

Motherhood is never what we predicted, and yet, somehow, we are still surprised every time something doesn't go according to plan.

In addition to the everyday disruptions that can challenge even the most organized of moms, our lives are also rerouted by more significant circumstances. From navigating special needs to loving rebellious teens, we adjust our expectations for motherhood again and again.

These are not experiences unique to the moms in my church. All mothers have had days and years that looked nothing like they planned.

Perhaps better than most, Jesus's mother, Mary, knew the unexpected upheavals of motherhood (see chap. 4). She was an unmarried virgin when an angel appeared and announced her pregnancy, and her life as a mom didn't get any more predictable from there. Soon after Jesus's birth, motherhood put Mary's life in danger and forced her to emigrate to a foreign country (Matt. 2:13–15). Later, she searched for three anxious days for her pre-teen, who'd been in the temple all along (Luke 2:41–51). Over the course of thirty years, she pondered the mystery of her son's identity (Luke 2:19, 51), witnessed his miracles (John 2:1–12), and reckoned with her place as just one mother among many in her son's eternal family (Matt. 12:46–50).

Motherhood was nothing Mary could have anticipated.

In the final hours of Jesus's earthly life, Mary experienced the greatest sorrow of motherhood. She stood at the cross as soldiers gambled for her son's clothing and the grave waited for his life.

But in the hour of her son's death, she was not abandoned: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'" (John 19:26–27). From the cross, Jesus took notice of her and cared for her. At the worst moment of her motherhood, he provided a family and a future for her.

Dear sister, this same Jesus cares for you in the struggles of your own motherhood. When upheavals overtake you and you stand, helpless, at the foot of his cross, he will show you the same tender care he showed Mary. He will give you a family in his church and a future in his heavenly kingdom. What's more, he will give you his very self—broken for your sins and raised for your new life.

In the pages of this book, Katie Faris will point you again and again to the precious promises of Scripture for struggling moms. She'll show you that it's okay to weep at the cross for the sorrows motherhood has brought you, but then she'll lift your eyes to the Savior who suffered on the cross for you. As you experience the unexpected, she'll remind you that in Jesus Christ we have a faithful friend and a Savior for sinners. He is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19), and in him we have the hope and comfort we need.

Introduction

IF YOU'RE READING THIS BOOK, it's likely motherhood looks different than you expected. Maybe something you hoped for is missing, or maybe you face challenges you never saw coming. Or you want to help someone for whom that's the case. My prayer is that this book offers gospel hope and comfort to all moms, but especially to those who feel hurt and bewildered by the unexpected sorrows of motherhood. But first, a memory.

A Story of Suffering and Grace

I sat at the kitchen table, a teenager in animated conversation with my mom, when she paused. A fleeting look passed over her eyes, and I tried to discern its meaning. Now it makes more sense; that moment was an awakening. As her mind traced back over the years, my mom realized something: *I didn't remember.*

While you and I live the more painful parts of motherhood, a lot of times our children are oblivious. They don't know anything different than what they experience. At least in the beginning, their suffering is simply part of their experience. It could be elevated liver enzymes or a missing limb. Like the milk they drink

or the sunlight passing warmth over their faces, it just is. For me, learning to crawl in a back brace had simply been learning to crawl. As a child, I hadn't thought twice about the fact that I looked like a turtle lugging its shell. It's just the way it was.

That afternoon, it clicked for my mom. I didn't remember things that for her were so vivid and packed with emotion: all the dire pronouncements from doctors; dozens of X-rays; challenges surrounding finding a specialist; financial concerns; and prayers of caring family and friends. I'd forgotten all of them along with my first taste of rice cereal.

But my mom remembered so much, from my arrival at dawn and first smile to the deep concern over my mixed-up vertebrae, the diagnosis of congenital kyphoscoliosis, and the questions about what the future would look like for her baby who wasn't like other babies. She knew the agony and tears that came with simultaneously loving the little girl God had specially formed while fighting the perception that motherhood hadn't delivered a well-formed daughter. And she understood how God had used that same agony and those same tears to deepen the roots of what had been her newly found faith and plant her in the soil of his word. With strong threads, the Lord had woven together the hearts of a young father, a new mother, and their firstborn child—a family—and had fused the bonds between this family and their church family, who joined them in praying and watching how God would work.

That day in the kitchen, my mom told me a story of suffering and grace, of pain and praise, of sacrifice and surrender, of hope and comfort. It was a story that neither she nor I chose, but it was a story in which God was the hero.

Hope and Comfort for You

What's your story, and who are its main characters? How has motherhood been a source of heartache or confusion, and when has it kept you awake at night? What plot twists have you already navigated, and what challenges do you currently face? Which chapters of your story prompt you to question God's goodness and how it plays out in your life? Whoever you are, and whatever your story is, thank you for opening *God Is Still Good: Gospel Hope and Comfort for the Unexpected Sorrows of Motherhood*.

Decades have passed since that conversation with my mom, and I've learned for myself that motherhood is much more than suffering, but it's not less, and there's a particular kind of suffering that moms experience. Maybe you've been walking on a difficult path for a long time, or maybe you're just starting out. Not to discourage you, but if you haven't encountered any thorns on your motherhood journey yet, you probably will at some point. When you do, in this book I hope you hear the validation of your pain. Whether you and I endure hardship in our own bodies or as moms caring for children facing difficulties, our afflictions are real, and our pain is worthy of grief.

But that's not all. While the Lord may not answer all our questions about our trials, the Bible provides a framework that explains our suffering and helps us combat common temptations and lies that travel with them. Through his word, God offers real hope and comfort even for the most heart-wrenching parts of motherhood. This hope is more than wishful thinking because it is grounded in God's past, present, and future faithfulness and anchored in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Similarly,

INTRODUCTION

God's comfort is more than sympathy—it offers courage and strength to the afflicted.

Yes, God is still good.

I may not know your name, but the Lord does. As you read, I pray that he uses the truths in this book to reassure you of his goodness toward you. God has given us stories of suffering and grace, and whether we tell them to our children at a kitchen table one day or to the ladies in our small groups or to an even broader audience, may they reflect his story and bring him much glory.

Motherhood Isn't What I Expected

MOTHERHOOD ISN'T WHAT I EXPECTED. It hasn't delivered all that I hoped it would, and instead it's given me some things I never asked for. What about you? Has motherhood been all you dreamed it would be? If not, you aren't as alone as you might think.

To be honest, I'm not sure what I expected. But it's been a whole lot more—more joy and more sorrow. It's also been both; it's been a call to service and sacrifice as well as one of the most rewarding experiences imaginable under heaven. While being a mom is a desirable and godly calling, it's one that exposes a heart to the wounding arrows of pain and grief. Some say it's a labor of love; it's also labor *and* love.

Keep in mind, there's no one-size-fits-all. Sometimes motherhood blooms in the security of a loving marriage, but sometimes a baby is born into a strained marriage or outside of marriage altogether. Motherhood can come according to plan, sooner or

later than hoped, or only briefly, leaving us empty-armed and soul-scarred. It arrives by Caesarean section, vaginal delivery, foster care, or adoption; to poverty or financial stability; with ecstasy or trauma.

We moms aren't one-size-fits-all either. We bring a variety of ages, ethnicities, family backgrounds, educational and career choices, life experiences, and expectations with us on this both wonderful and perilous journey. All these factors impact how we approach and process the wins and losses of mom life—wins and losses which are themselves both real and varied.

So when we traverse this road called motherhood and approach the vulnerable places where it meets suffering, we do so bearing burdens of all shapes and sizes. Similarly, our detours onto more precarious paths may differ significantly. One mom encounters the sign with an arrow pointing to “Infertility” while another reads “Special Needs.” Some approach these signs earlier on their parenting journey; others bump into “Childhood Leukemia” or “Rebellious Daughter” further down the road. Sadly, some moms expect to read “Racial Discrimination”; others, like me, are surprised by “Genetic Condition.”

Each of our stories is unique, but all matter. Each mother and each child is an image bearer of immense value and worth in the eyes of Almighty God, and though gut-wrenching and tear-stained, our stories find meaning and redemption when they are viewed as part of his story.

We can feel isolated on these thorny, off-road trails of motherhood. Whether alone in the NICU, a bedroom, or a food pantry line, we can be cut off from or misunderstood by family and friends. But these paths can also be the very same places where

we meet Jesus for the first time—or get to know him and his ways better. Jesus is the God-man: “Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6–7).

As one who understands the human experience, and suffering in particular, Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses. And even though he resisted temptation, he knows its pull. We can expect grace and help when we draw near to Jesus on these lonely paths (Heb. 4:15–16).

Whether it's stretch marks, late-night feedings, a child's compromised immune system, or a wayward teenager, there are real hardships that accompany this beautiful calling. Motherhood may require more faith than anything else we've ever participated in, but it can also open our eyes much wider to our complete dependence on Jesus, his sufficiency, the beauty of the gospel, and the soul-satisfying promises of God. Stressed, weary, hurting, anxious, fearful, and struggling moms like you and me are desperate for the hope and comfort that God offers in his word when motherhood doesn't deliver as expected. Here's some of my story.

Growing Up

One of my favorite children's book series was *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner. As the oldest child in my family, I think I admired the self-sufficiency of the four main characters and how they looked out for one another after their parents died. Later, I devoured *Anne of Green Gables*, L. M. Montgomery's story of an imaginative orphan girl who finds an unlikely but loving home with an elderly brother and sister. (I'm not sure how my parents felt about my attraction to orphan tales, but my

mom and dad supported my love for reading.) Perhaps influenced by this steady literary diet, when I thought of being a mom in my early years, my mental image included adopting at least six children. There was no husband in those early aspirations toward motherhood.

At some point in adolescence, my ideas shifted. Boys became more interesting—intriguing, actually. I thought I might even want to kiss one. My physical and emotional maturity coincided with a spiritual awakening. No longer the want-to-be self-sufficient child imagining herself as a strong, self-sufficient single woman raising a boatload of kids, my thoughts expanded, leaving more room for marriage. They also became more rooted in Scripture.

Having been brought up in a Christian home, I knew the gospel and trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins at an early age. But in my teen years, I wrestled to make my faith my own. As the Lord met me in that struggle, my love for the Bible also grew. Reading that Eve was designed as a helper for Adam, equally addressed in God's mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), I began to wonder whether God might have a husband for me, someone with whom I would be united in work and mission. I started contemplating the future from the perspective of helper, nurturer, and caregiver. My much younger brother and sister as well as extensive babysitting opportunities outside of my home gave me plenty of practical experience caring for children during my teen years.

Even as I pursued a college education and then ministry opportunities, desires for marriage and motherhood were strong, and I regularly prayed for the man I hoped to marry and any children we would have.

Not What I Expected

For me, marriage and children came later than I expected, but they came fairly close together. Before I married Scott Faris—my tall, handsome, wise, humble, funny, gifted, and faith-filled husband—we talked about how many children we might have, Lord willing. I was twenty-seven and he was thirty-five, and we decided that if we wanted to have three or four children, we should start our family sooner rather than later.

On our wedding day, Scott's dad (who is a pastor) prayed for our future children in front of friends and family. A month and a half later, I sat on our queen-sized bed in a bright, sunny apartment bedroom holding a positive pregnancy test. In shock, I showed it to my new husband, feeling guilty for my tears and wanting faith to embrace this desired but unexpectedly early gift of our first child.

It didn't take long for the wonder surrounding this new baby growing in my womb to overcome my trepidation, and soon I had a stack of prenatal books next to that bed, telling me what to expect in labor and delivery and as a new mom. I read the websites too, the ones that compared the size of my developing child to a blueberry or an avocado.

For some reason, though, I skipped all the sections explaining what to expect in the event of a Cesarean delivery. Maybe I didn't think they applied to me—there was no family history to suggest that they would. When my firstborn was frank breech (sitting upright instead of head down) and his amniotic fluid was low at six days past my due date, I faced an emergency C-section. That was the first of many surprises, and perhaps it was my first detour off the road of motherhood that I had expected to follow.

Then came the feeding challenges and the bottles that overflowed our kitchen sink; the time demands of breastfeeding, pumping milk, and supplementing with formula; and the painful details of realizing two months into mom life that my son was tongue-tied and needed a surgical procedure to help him suck more efficiently. In the meantime, my incision took weeks to heal, and it was months before I felt comfortable in my body and clothes again. The books hadn't prepared me for any of it. Suffice it to say, as much as I loved my newborn and being his mom, motherhood didn't look or feel the way I'd anticipated.

It isn't wrong to imagine and look forward to rocking and cuddling a new baby, but most of my early memories as a mom were anything but serene and relaxed. I grieved the absence of something I had hoped for—an elusive, unhurried bonding that didn't involve problem-solving and tears, midnight walks down the hallway, and fears pounding loudly in my mind as I tried in vain to console my infant son. I was in the middle of my first personal encounter with motherhood, and my reality didn't line up with my expectations.

What I Didn't Expect

As in my experience with a newborn, sometimes motherhood doesn't deliver what we had hoped for. Other times, it bears something we didn't expect.

Before I was a mom, I didn't care what color eyes or hair my baby would have. I wanted the gender to be a surprise. And since my husband and I were committed to loving and caring for our child no matter what, we decided not to do any extra genetic testing prior to birth.

But then came a time when genes suddenly mattered. By the summer of 2013 Scott and I had four children, an infant baby girl and her three older brothers ages two, five, and seven. Our hearts and hands were full. We'd weathered tantrums and tumbles, mosquito bites and bee stings, crumbs and black Sharpie marks on our couch. But we hadn't seen this one coming.

Following a concerning illness, one child was diagnosed with a serious genetic condition called Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency (Alpha-1) that can have life-threatening impacts on the liver in childhood and the liver or lungs over time. On a bright summer day, Scott and I learned that two more of our children also had this condition. Already reeling from one child's diagnosis, we were devastated. In that moment, I asked what my mother had asked when she heard my diagnosis, and what so many other moms have asked: "Why couldn't it have been me instead? Why my *children*?"

Scott and I huddled together on our front porch, weeping. We cried for our children, for ourselves, for all of it—pain, sorrow, sin, the fall, broken bodies, and messed-up genes. I sobbed until my abs hurt because of that inconsolable ache inside my gut that things weren't as I thought they should be, and I couldn't do anything about it. I knew "all things work together for good" for God's children (Rom. 8:28), but what good could come from any of this? In my sorrow, did I still believe God really was good—and that what he does is good, and for good?

Hope and Comfort for Moms in All Seasons and Stages

I don't live in that place of desperate grief right now, eyes red and swollen from weeping, but I remember it well, and I walk with a

painful awareness that I might relive it at any moment. The years since that time have included pediatric specialists, additional diagnoses, diet changes, ambulance rides, finger pricks, hospital stays, and repeated blood draws. My husband and I are on a first-name basis with our pharmacists, and our family's medications regularly fill the drawer labeled *F* (for "Faris") behind the counter. We've battled the flu, pneumonia, and COVID-19 along with perplexity, anxiety, fear, and loneliness surrounding our children's conditions. And I've faced disappointment, not in my children or motherhood itself, both of which I view as gifts, but in the ambiguous loss of some kind of "normal" childhood without the sting of these add-ons.

I don't know what this journey called motherhood has looked like for you, where you've walked on a broad, well-traveled, and familiar road or where your experience has taken you off-road, following unexpected trails. But if you've walked some of the more harrowing paths of motherhood, I want to assure you that no matter how lonely you feel, you're not alone.

You're in good company. While your story and experience are unique, there are moms who have walked precarious paths before you. There are moms facing similar challenges today—moms like me who sometimes feel our foothold slipping and who are attuned to anticipate something lurking, ready to pounce, when we round the next bend. The apostle Peter reminded persecuted Christians that "the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Pet. 5:9). Though our suffering, yours and mine, is of a different nature than that of his immediate audience, here's a similar truth: there are women in our neighborhoods, sisters

in our churches, and moms around the world experiencing hardships related to suffering and motherhood just like we are. You're not the only one.

And here's another truth that is even more precious: Jesus is a Savior who is familiar with sorrow and "acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). He wants to walk with us—and he is able to help us persevere by faith, with grace—even on difficult paths we never would have chosen. When we walk with the Lord, these off-road trails aren't ends in themselves. They aren't just painful parts of our motherhood journey. They too are part of our journey heavenward. This reality offers great hope and comfort to moms facing challenges in all seasons and stages of motherhood.

The path of a medically complex family wasn't one that my husband and I wandered down on purpose, and this story isn't the one I would've chosen to tell; the telling itself stirs emotions, draws forth tears, and exposes my weaknesses for any and all to know. But "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 Cor. 1:3–4). My family's trial is real, but so is God's comfort, and I love him more and cling to him more tightly because of it. My hope is fixed on him, and through it all I can say with certainty that he is still good.

God's Word Speaks to Suffering Moms

While my children's specialists are extremely knowledgeable and some medications are helpful, I don't put my ultimate hope in doctors or treatments to cure my kids. The only true hope I've found is in God's word—which was written "that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we

might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). In the following chapters, we will explore biblical truths and hear what they say to mothers like us in our sorrow.

One of the beauties of God’s word is its relevance for all people and situations, time periods, and cultures. It transcends breast-feeding and bottle-feeding preferences, educational choices, the lines drawn around neighborhoods, and the current political climate. It speaks to all moms of all skin colors who function in all tax brackets. The younger moms and the older ones. The moms who go to an office and those who stay home. The moms whose children need special instruction and those with honors students. It levels the playing field and at the same time raises the bar.

God’s word speaks to all of us, telling us that the pain we experience in labor and delivery—or the adoption process—is only a foretaste of the particular suffering a mother endures. Within the Bible’s pages, we discover truth that is sufficient to explain our suffering as moms and sustain us in it, even when our contexts vary. The Bible assures believing mothers that our pain isn’t in vain and we won’t always suffer. No matter how confusing the middle parts of our stories seem, no matter how bitter they taste, we look forward to a very good ending. No matter how tangled and rocky, tear-filled and, yes, even bloody, these paths may be, they lead to a glorious place.

Motherhood may look different than you or I expected, either because we don’t have what we hoped for or we have what we didn’t see coming. It’s more—more joy and more pain. It’s both—labor and love, grief and hope. But Christian motherhood is by faith, a faith that sees a trustworthy God weaving our stories, the

so-much-more along with the happy and sad parts, into his story of grace and glory.

Prayer

Dear Lord, your ways are higher than ours and your thoughts than ours (Isa. 55:9). Even when we're surprised by our circumstances, you're not. Our wins, our losses—you don't measure them the way we do. We confess that motherhood is more than we expected—more joy and more sorrow. It's both a privilege and a call to sacrifice. Where suffering intersects with this worthy calling, please comfort us and fill our hearts with hope. Give us eyes of faith that see you weaving our stories into your own story. In Jesus's name, amen.

Bible Verses

Isa. 53:3

Phil. 2:6–7

Rom. 15:4

Heb. 4:15–16

2 Cor. 1:3–4

1 Pet. 5:9

Reflection Questions

1. Think about your personal history and how it impacts the way you approach and process the wins and losses of motherhood. What extra baggage do you carry on your parenting journey?
2. Have you encountered any detour signs off the main road of motherhood? If so, which ones? Are you walking any of these off-road trails right now?
3. How does Jesus's humility encourage you in your weakness (Phil. 2:6–7; Heb. 4:15–16)?

MOTHERHOOD ISN'T WHAT I EXPECTED

4. How have you already experienced comfort in your trials associated with motherhood?
5. To what extent can you see God's goodness in your present circumstances, and where is it hard to find?