



RISEN MOTHERHOOD

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I

WHY DOES THE GOSPEL MATTER IN MOTHERHOOD?



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Emily and Laura

Risen Motherhood started with potty training. It sounds silly, but as we both taught our oldest sons to use the potty, feeling weary of frequent clothing changes and the slow climb to success, we needed some tangible hope.

Since we lived five hours apart at the time, we discussed our experiences over a walkie-talkie app on our phones, leaving each other voice messages to respond to. We lamented the soiled laundry, celebrated the tiny victories, and shared our deeper struggles.

“It’s just not clicking. I feel angry—is that normal?” one of us asked.

“Do you feel impatient? How do I give grace when it feels like he isn’t making it to the potty *on purpose*?” the other asked.

We both wondered aloud, “Does the Bible address this? If Christ really changes everything, how does he change potty training? What does the gospel have to say about this?”

At first the answers were unclear. We started by swapping practical tips, finding humor in our battle stories. We fumbled, but we also dug deeper until we discovered the treasure of the gospel. We discussed our sin issues, building on each other’s thoughts as the transforming work of Christ came clearly into focus. Only when we found our identity in Christ instead of the success of our children were we able to model his love to those who just couldn’t get it. (It didn’t always sound this clear and concise of course, but the gist of it was there.)

Through that process, our motherhood changed in a concrete way. Our children weren't suddenly dry all day, and we still swapped strategies, but the gospel proved more hopeful than any online article, more helpful than any book we could buy, and more sustaining than any quick fix we shared with one another.

It was a relief to find that it really is true—the gospel changes everything.

A Fix That Fails Us

We became first-time moms within nine months of each other, and although we didn't realize it at the time, we both entered motherhood with high expectations. We had visions of tidy living rooms, gourmet homemade dinners, peaceful walks with the stroller, and obedient children who loved Jesus (and their mamas).

We had a lot to learn, but we felt ready for the challenge. As we put together our baby registries—full of cute swaddles, high chairs, stylish (yet practical) diaper bags, and all the necessities—we were starry-eyed and optimistic. We knew there would be hard things, but we felt as prepared as we could be. After all, we were equipped with well-rounded registries, how-to books on motherhood, mom-friends who had gone before us, and the endless answers a Google search could provide.

Today, with eight kids between us, our optimistic expectations have toppled under the pressures of everyday life. Just like when we realized our carefully selected muslin swaddles were insufficient at holding our Houdini babies' arms in place, motherhood left us feeling inadequate, frustrated, and desperate for new solutions. We hastily searched for answers to where, when, and why our mothering went wrong. Although we found some helpful tips and practical strategies, in the end, the how-to books offered insufficient instructions, our mom-friends did things we didn't understand and didn't want to emulate, and Google (in all its millions of search results) didn't always hold the correct answers to our questions.

Other moms around us experienced a hole in their hopes for motherhood too. And it wasn't just our own mom-friends—it's a nearly universal experience in modern motherhood. According to a Barna Group study, 95 percent

of moms say they need to do better in at least one area of life, 80 percent say they feel overwhelmed by stress, 70 percent say they don't get enough rest, and more than 50 percent feel overcommitted and dissatisfied by their balance of work and home life.¹

If motherhood is supposed to be so wonderful—one of life's biggest blessings—why do we feel stressed, tired, dissatisfied, and overcommitted? If social media personalities, motherhood gurus, and book-writing experts hold the answers, why do we need more and more help?

Sometimes our response to “not enough” feelings in motherhood is to brush off our guilt instead of looking beneath it. Influencers, authors, and even our own friends and family tell us that simply because we are our children's loving moms, we *are* enough. Our well-intentioned efforts (however large or small) are all that's needed. We should stop worrying about the nagging guilt and create the life we want.

But deep down we still have this lurking feeling that we're missing the mark, and we don't know how to cope with it. So we joke and eye roll about our child's behavior. We post our mom-fails to social media. We let the mess be messy without bothering to clean it up. We tease the moms who seem more balanced or accomplished. When in doubt, we carve out more “me time” or escape into exercise, food, work, or social media. We lower the bar until our guilt is quieted.

If you are like us, these tactics fail to fully alleviate the guilt, stress, and pressures of everyday motherhood. Instead they send us on a confusing trial-and-error journey, where we never find rest. We can handle the striving for a while, but eventually something as simple as another potty training accident sends us over the edge. We're left dizzy, discouraged, and disarmed.

The mom culture at large and your natural desires want you to believe joy and success are won in the battle between the spilled milk and the kitchen floors, the stickers and the progress chart, your work and life balance, or your attitude and your child's behavior. But that's not it at all. This is a battle that's much

¹ The Barna Group, “Tired & Stressed, but Satisfied: Moms Juggle Kids, Career & Identity,” *Barna*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/tired-stressed-but-satisfied-moms-juggle-kids-career-identity/>.

bigger. A cosmic battle. It's a battle between the spirit and the flesh. Between good and evil. Between life and death.

It's a battle for your very soul.

Why We Need a Risen Motherhood

The world would have you believe the problem is that you can't *seem* to get your act together, but the reality is that you *can't* get your act together. Not in the sense that your sink always seems to be piled high with dishes, or you're not getting to the gym as often as you should, or you shoot random discipline strategies from the hip every 30 minutes. No, you can't get your act together because you're a sinner in need of a Savior.

Instead of showing our children the grace we've been shown, we build walls of rules and regulations to earn God's favor. Instead of serving our husbands out of love, we grumble in our hearts and keep a record of all the ways they've let us down in the past. Instead of spending time with our neighbors, we close up because we don't want the inconvenience or discomfort of getting to know someone new. Instead of reorienting our standards to God's, we look to our friends' or our news feeds. Instead of putting our hope in Christ, we put hope in our own efforts and comfort—living for naptime, bedtime, when Daddy gets home, when we get to leave for work, or when we'll have time to zone out on our phones.

In the short term, we are far too easily motivated by the promise of a Netflix binge, the sweet treat in the pantry, or the upcoming girls' trip. But none of these things last beyond a moment, and they don't cure the problem deep within us. We cannot will ourselves into finding joy in motherhood because we cannot will ourselves into the obedience or love God requires of us. If we're to find true, lasting joy in our motherhood journey, what we need is the work of Jesus Christ.

We don't need the world's version of motherhood; we need a risen motherhood, transformed by the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. We need his shed blood if we're going to shed our guilt and failures. We need his fullness to fill us where we are empty. We need his sacrifice and hurt so we can sacrifice for others

WE NEED A RISEN MOTHERHOOD



until it hurts. We need his wounds to cure our wounds. We need his atonement to atone once and for all for our sins. We need his death to give us life.

Understanding Risen Motherhood

These things sound nice. You may be nodding along while still wondering, “What exactly does that mean? We need his wounds to cure our wounds? How is that going to help me *right now*?”

That’s exactly the question we hope to answer in this book. We’re not giving parenting advice. We’re not looking back with wisdom from the experience of years. We’re moms looking at these problems with you, drawing a big line from the church sermon to the snotty nose that needs to be wiped (again).

In the remainder of part 1 (chapters 2 and 3), we’ll talk through the gospel story and look at its application to the general concept of motherhood. We’ll examine how this redemptive narrative gives us hope beyond the temporary fixes the world provides as we orient our lives around God’s Word.

In part 2 we’ll tackle 14 common topics moms face, exploring a specific application of the gospel for each subject, following the pattern of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. For believers especially, this is not empty repetition. It’s a story arc with the power to revive our faith, pointing our eyes back to Christ. This pattern will be a familiar friend to you if you’ve followed the Risen Motherhood ministry.

God’s overall design for motherhood is unchanging and universal, but each mom’s life is unique because of her culture, background, life experience, socioeconomic status, and more. There are endless ways to look at each topic in this book and apply the gospel. We’ve chosen just one way for each chapter. To cover everything about each topic would require an entire library!

In part 3 we’ll encourage you to grow in your love for God by developing Bible literacy and gospel fluency, even during your child’s little years. We’ll send you off equipped with methods for applying the gospel to whatever you’re facing in your everyday life.

Risen Motherhood Is for You

We're just two moms with two life experiences. We are still learning and growing. Our kids sometimes wake up too early and stay up too late. They throw tantrums in public places. They wear four layers of costumes at once and would like to have a continual stream of candy handed to them throughout the day. We have common struggles, but we also have a common desire to press beyond commiseration into Christlikeness. We're shocked at how much we've learned in our short years of motherhood, and we're confident we'll learn even more after we publish this book!

Through this book we hope you'll be encouraged and that you'll gain a greater ability to see God and your own life through gospel lenses. We pray this book will springboard discussions with others in your church or community so you can think deeply about topics you may not have considered before. If the two of us can learn to see life through a gospel lens between breakfast and bath time, so can you. But it takes practice. And it requires intentionality, diligence, growth, and admitting you need to make course corrections. But we'll also attest that God is faithful, and he will help a mother who longs to live out the gospel in her everyday life.

This book is for any mother who has ever wondered if God cares about the fact that she's cleaning out the cheese crackers ground into the carpet. For the mother who feels as though she has reached her limit but doesn't know where to turn for help. For the mother who secretly fears her world will crumble if she doesn't keep all the plates spinning. For the mother who is lonely and can't hear the call to life in God's community. For the mother who is grieving through the deepest kind of heartache and is crying out, "God, do you see this? Do you hear me?"

This book is for every mom who is asking, "Does the gospel matter to motherhood?"

Oh, friend, the gospel changes everything.
Let's get started.