

# M *Is for* Mama

Abbie Halberstadt

Illustrations by Lindsay Long



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## **M Is for Mama**

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*For Alby.  
Because you always believed I could.  
You are my favorite. Really, really.*



# The Halberstadt Family

Shaun and Abbie

Ezra (16)

Theo (7)

Simon (14)

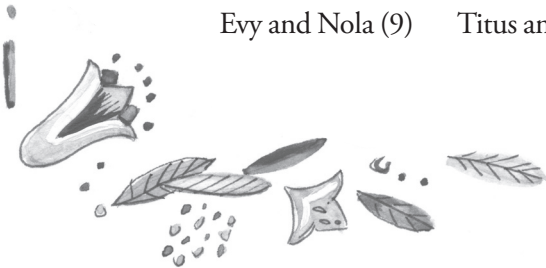
Honor (5)

Della (11)

Shiloh (3)

Evy and Nola (9)

Titus and Tobias (1)





# Contents

Introduction .....	7
1. The Culture of Mediocre Motherhood .....	11
2. No Two Good Mamas Look Alike .....	23
3. What Is That to You? Follow Me .....	35
4. And What Does the Lord Require of Thee? .....	47
5. Self-Care Versus Soul Care .....	59
6. When We're Guilty of Mom Guilt .....	71
7. The Profession of Motherhood .....	83
8. When the Seat of Our Pants Tears .....	97
9. The Gentleness Challenge .....	109
10. Training Our Kids in the Way They Should Go .....	123
11. The Penny Reward System .....	139

12. Boot Camp Parenting . . . . .	151
13. Cultivating a Peaceful Home . . . . .	163
14. We Are the Gatekeepers . . . . .	177
15. The Birds and the Bees . . . . .	193
16. You Don't Have to Do It All . . . . .	207
17. Emotions Are Not Facts . . . . .	221
Favorite Resources . . . . .	233
Acknowledgments . . . . .	235
Notes . . . . .	237



## Introduction

If you've got two X chromosomes, you can be a mother. The standards are so low-key that fully 50 percent of the world's population acs the qualification test before they've even taken one breath outside their own mothers' bellies.

But the physical ability to bear children does little to lessen the pang of panicked inadequacy almost every new mother feels upon being handed a tiny mewling infant to take home mere hours after forceful eviction from her body. We buckle their fragile, twiglike arms into a contraption made of plastic and foam and wonder if it should even be legal to grant someone with so little experience the primary task of raising another person from birth to adulthood.

I mean, think about it. People go to school for years to clean teeth. And yet it's okay to be given full responsibility for an actual human being with literally zero required reading, certifications, degrees, or crash courses of any kind.

And therein lies the mystery of motherhood.

We're expected to simply "get it." To "go with our guts." To be a natural baby whisperer. That all-encompassing rush of intense mother love we experience when we first lock eyes with our newborn covers a multitude of sins, right?

Well, yes. And no.

Because no matter how attached (or not) we feel to our babies, the fact of the matter is that instincts do little to combat silent reflux or calm a baby who refuses to latch *or* take a bottle. Or how about convincing the sweet little gal who thinks it's hilarious to wake up at 3:00 a.m. to pat your face and play that sleep is a better idea?

And then there's the fact that they're only babies for approximately 17 blinks of the eye before, suddenly, they're walking and talking and expressing opinions like "Ew" and "No" and "Sto-op!"

And yet again, the game has changed. And you're faced with an entirely new set of challenges and joys.

As a mama to many, with children in every age category from baby to teenager, I can assure you that the game never stops changing. At least, not in its particulars. There will always be some new wrinkle to iron out—that *one child* who breaks the mold entirely.

However, I firmly believe that the Bible has given us clear principles to live by that can make this whole motherhood gig a lot less intimidating and isolating. If Eve and Ruth and Rachel and Elizabeth and Mary and millions more in between were able to muddle through this mess of motherhood by God's grace, then so can we.

But we must be willing to heed the words of Proverbs 4:6-7: "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." Hosea 4:6 (ESV) states it even more dramatically when it says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The world may not officially require a degree for motherhood, but when we approach it with the same air of studiousness that we would any other profession at which we want to excel, we exponentially increase the likelihood of our not only surviving but thriving in a household of peace instead of chaos.

So where do we get this wisdom worth every penny we've got? Job 12:12 says, "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" My favorite source of mama know-how is those godly women



who have gone before me and “crash tested” so many different scenarios with their own kids. My own mother, who raised my brother and me. A precious friend and mama of twelve, almost twenty years my senior. Another wise mama of three who is a few years older than I. Sally Clarkson. Elisabeth Elliot. Ruth Bell Graham.

All these women have different numbers of children, mothering philosophies, personalities, and preferences. But they also have at least one thing in common that I want to emulate—something every godly mother should: a desire to “conduct [themselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel... without being frightened in any way by those who oppose [them]” (Philippians 1:27-28). That last bit is just as key as the first because, in a culture in which women clink their wine glasses in celebration each night for “surviving my kids for one more day,” there will be many who oppose a view of motherhood that says that we can do more by Christ’s strength.

Not only that, but there will be many who resent a perspective of motherhood that chooses to grasp hold of something other than the hard and the loss of “me time”: namely, the abundant gems of joy and fulfillment that glitter amidst the everyday landscape of lunch prep, potty training, and sassy attitudes. Sometimes we just need someone to remind us of what an incredibly rad undertaking this whole motherhood gig really is.

Which is where I come in. I’m not even forty yet, so I don’t qualify as “aged,” but I am a mama of ten children. And I’m volunteering to be your cheerleader, your boot camp coach, your friend, and your fellow journeyer—“all things to all mamas,” to paraphrase Paul. Because, while I do not have this whole mothering thing figured out or nailed down by any stretch, I have had enough practice applying some of the wise biblical principles I’ve learned from the women I listed above (and others) to get a pretty good feel for some strategies that are helpful to all mamas. For it is “a truth universally acknowledged: that a child in possession of a sinful nature must be in want of a mama who loves and seeks the Lord.” (Sorry, Jane Austen. I had to.)





# The Culture of Mediocre Motherhood

EXAMINING THE ATTITUDES THAT  
KEEP US FROM CHRISTLIKE  
EXCELLENCE

I have a feeling that the phrase “mediocre motherhood” will have quite the polarizing effect on the casual bookstore browser who happens to catch sight of this cover. A certain percentage of the population will immediately relate to it, assuming they know exactly what I mean. They may or may not be right. Another group might pick up this book and thumb through it out of sheer curiosity. What could this crazy lady with all these kids possibly mean by referring to motherhood of any kind as “mediocre”? And the last type of reader will probably pick up this book with the express intention of using it for kindling without ever cracking its spine. How *dare* I imply that any mother might possibly be less than a sparkly unicorn goddess warrior? After all, we have *given birth* or *gone through fire to choose our children*.

We are mothers. Hear us *roar*!

I’m sure I’ve missed a reaction or two, including that of utter indifference, but these are the three most prevalent possibilities that pop to mind, and so I feel compelled to explain, as clearly as I can, what I mean by such a loaded phrase.

But first, let's see what Merriam-Webster has to say about the word "mediocre." It describes someone or something as "of moderate or low quality, value, ability, or performance: ordinary, so-so."

Ouch, right?

It's not a state to which any human wants to aspire. Or at least, none *should* want to. And yet it's a state I can all too easily slide toward—and one to which our current mothering culture seems to gravitate.

In the words of *The Princess Bride's* inimitable Inigo Montoya, "Let me 'splain."

## Why Relatable Is Not Always Reliable

My blog requires that I spend time on social media, interacting primarily with other mothers. And as anyone who has spent two minutes on Facebook or Instagram surely knows, social media is full of memes. Especially motherhood memes.

One in particular has stuck with me for years. It goes a little something like this:

**God:** So how do you think you're doing as a mother?

**Me:** Well, I fed my kids pizza almost every night this week, and I know I should read to them, but I don't really enjoy it, so I usually skip it. I've worn the same outfit three days in a row, and I can't remember the last time I washed my hair. I like our talks at dinner, but I worry a lot, so a lot of the time I'm thinking about stuff that's stressing me instead of really listening when my daughter tells me about her day, and I think she knows it. Most days, I'm too exhausted to do anything but watch Netflix all evening while I sip a couple of glasses of wine, and then I end up going to bed too late, so when I wake up in the morning to do it all over again, I'm really grouchy with my kids.

**God:** But do you love them?

**Me:** With all my heart.

**God:** You sound like a wonderful mom to me.

Setting aside the contrived “conversation with God” construct of this meme, let’s examine it a little more closely, shall we?

Here are the parts I don’t give a rip about (you may feel differently). First, your three-day clothes. If you don’t smell, and you haven’t encountered the same people every single day (you know, besides your children and your husband), you can probably get away with this. Heaven knows I’ve thrown on the same top and jeans (and the same pj pants and tee) a couple of days in a row because they just ain’t dirty enough to throw in the hamper. Also, about the unwashed hair thing, as a curly girl who washes her hair once a week *at most*, I am throwing zero shade in your direction over this. Unless it’s grease city—in which case, girl, wash your hair.

Things start to get a little iffier for me with the pizza-on-repeat business. And not because I don’t love a good pie every now and again. I’m also not a stickler for organic or hemp hearts or kombucha (though all three can be stellar life choices), but I do feel like we, as the providers of sustenance, should be making an effort here. Our children’s health is a big deal, and a steady diet of pizza (or chicken nuggets or boxed mac and cheese) is only going to go so far toward giving them the good stuff their bodies and brains need to thrive.

From this point on, the meme completely falls apart for me. And it’s *not* because I can’t relate to not particularly enjoying certain activities with my kids, worrying too much and listening too little, or wanting to do nothing more than veg on the sofa every evening.

Because I can.

I think all those are perfectly normal escapist responses to the overwhelm that motherhood can bring. And they are the first doors that my tired self wants to walk through when I’m given the option to choose. But here’s the thing: Just because something is relatable doesn’t mean it’s not mediocre.



*Just because something is relatable  
doesn't mean it's not mediocre.*

In fact, relatability can stray far past mediocrity and nose-dive into outright petty meanness. Another meme that I stumbled upon went a little something like this: “You’re not a real mother unless you’ve given your three-year-old the finger behind your back today.” Based on the hundreds of enthusiastically affirmative responses, I couldn’t help but conclude that this was a highly relatable sentiment for this poster’s audience (which was, presumably, comprised of women who had mothered at least one three-year-old).




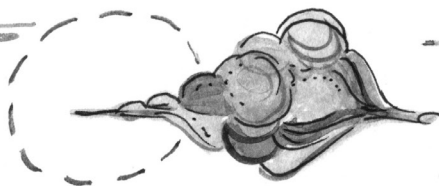
The thing is, I’ve parented eight three-year-olds so far, and while “giving the finger” isn’t really on my radar, I can’t deny the ungodly anger that has welled up in my soul at times over the actions of a tiny human who only recently stopped wearing a diaper.

It’s ridiculous (I mean, we’re the adults in this scenario), but it’s also relatable. Which is why I feel I must reiterate: Relatability—while helpful at times—is not the gold standard of motherhood.

And that very relatability is, all too often, the rotten core of the argument that says, “If this many mothers also feel this way, it must be right and true.”

Thank God that we have his Holy Word, the Bible, to combat this kind of reasoning. Paul, the “super apostle” himself, says, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18-19 ESV).

Talk about the height of relatability (how many times have I mentally bemoaned my inability to resist that cinnamon roll or bowl of ice cream I *know* I don’t really need?)—except with a solid undergirding of truth. The first meme I mentioned expresses a kind of wistfulness—almost a wishing that the mother in the scenario *could* do better—then ends with a shrug of acknowledgment (and an A-okay from God) that “it is what it is.” And the



It's not our bad days  
or our hormones  
that are the real hang-ups  
but instead  
our inability to be anything  
other than mediocre  
without Christ.

second meme is full of angry defiance. Yes, my attitude toward my own child is one of rage and impatience, but so what? Everybody feels this way.

Neither acknowledges that the real root of the issue is our own sinful mothering tendencies. Because it's not our bad days or our hormones or our understandably tired responses that are the real hang-ups here. The true culprit? Our inability to be anything other than mediocre without Christ.

Sure, we can bootstrap our way through a day, a week, a month, or even a year. But without Christ's transforming power at work in us, we will inevitably slide back into our patterns of complacency or anger. For as Philippians 2:13 (ESV) says, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." The most disciplined of us might be able to maintain a veneer of schedules and control most of the time, but true excellence—the kind that comes from a renewed mind and heart—can only flow from the Holy Spirit's pricking of our consciences and what Ephesians 5:26 describes as "the washing with water through the word."

I experienced just such a conscience pricking when I was in the throes of first-trimester exhaustion and nausea during my pregnancy with Honor. We had a family wedding looming, and I was hoping to find just the right dress to accommodate my awkward "is-she-or-isn't-she" bump. I didn't care nearly as much about the dress as my hours spent scrolling the internet implied. It was the mindless distraction from my pregnancy misery that I craved. I knew I should read my Bible with at least as much fervor as I cross-referenced dress sales and that I should go to bed at a decent time so that I had the energy both my growing baby and my other children required. But I stubbornly clung to my right to "check out" each evening after the kids had gone to bed. Even as I defensively told myself that this was "my time" and that my nightly mental escape wasn't affecting anyone else, the Lord was gently poking and prodding at my stubborn heart. He reminded me that even though wedding-party dress shopping isn't mediocre, devoting myself to it to the detriment of my family or my relationship with him is.

I'm fairly certain most pregnant moms have shared my hormone-fueled feelings of escapism, at least briefly. So what am I proposing? If relatability



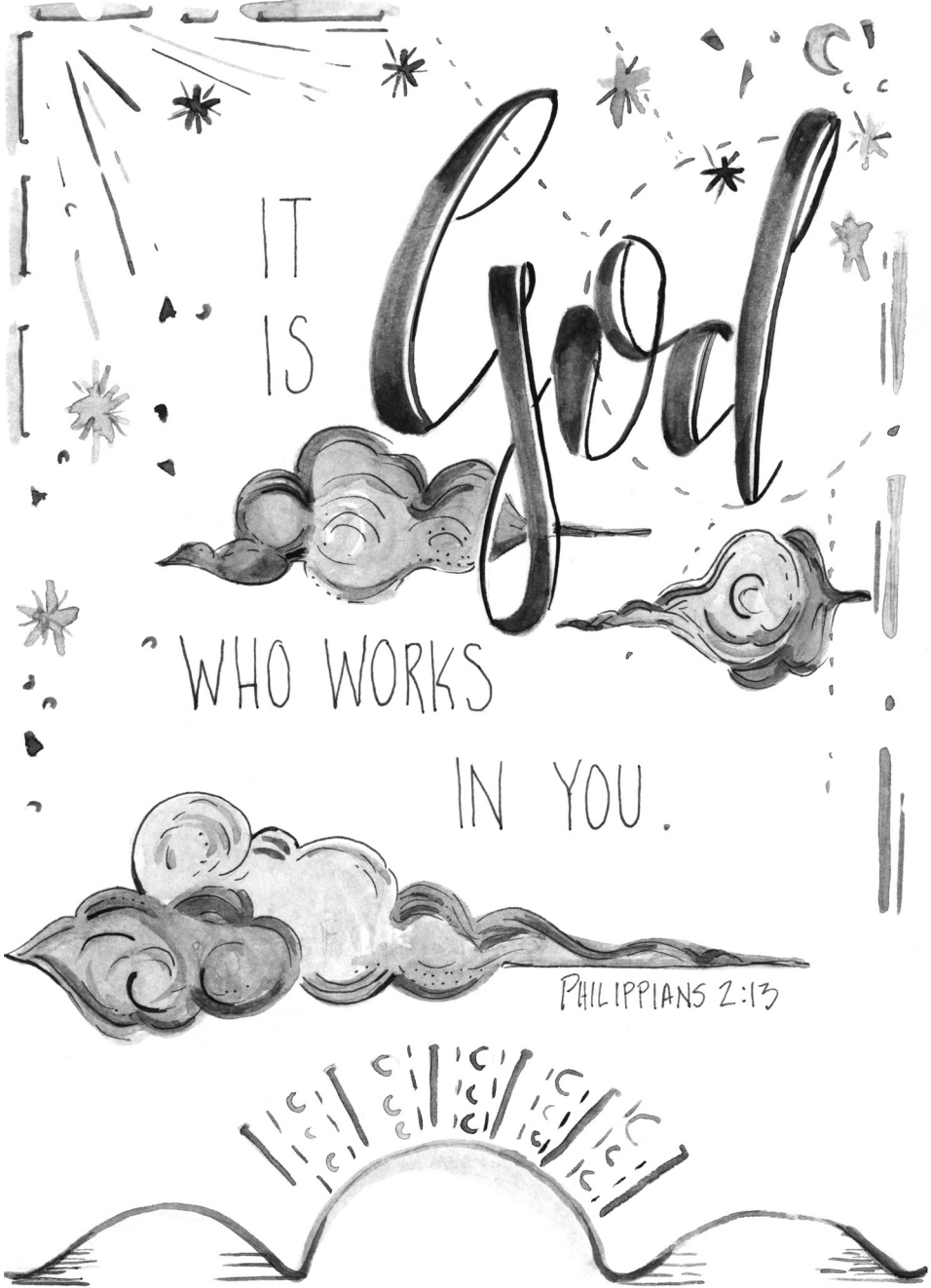
IT IS

Good

WHO WORKS

IN YOU.

PHILIPPIANS 2:13



is mediocrity (it isn't always, by the way), then what exactly are we called to be as mothers? Is this some sort of competition to collect accolades from our peers? Are we called to be a generation of Tiger Moms with perfectly coiffed hair (nope), polished children (nuh-uh), and Instagram-worthy quiet times with the Lord (ha!)?

Can you tell yet that my answer is a thousand times no?

## A Sacred Sameness

In fact, rather than making this about being better or different from any other mom out there, I'm proposing that we pursue conformity. But not conformity to our cultural norm. If that's what we're chasing, we may discover that we fit in just fine and can always manage to find someone to justify our shortcomings or make us feel better about our bad days. But we will not have found, at the end of it all, that we look much like Jesus or that we have gotten any closer to feeling at peace with motherhood. The only way to effect real change—the kind that produces lasting joy and fulfillment—is to pursue what Romans 8:29 calls conformity to the image of Christ.

We are *all* supposed to be like Christ—a kind of sacred sameness that unites rather than divides us. The basics of Christlike conformity are identical for all of us: repentance, salvation, Scripture, prayer, loving the Lord our God, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. But the particular ways in which we express our devotion to him will be different for each individual mama, depending on temperament, background, personality, resources, and giftings.

In this digital age, we have access to what *seems* like a front-row seat to other people's entire lives—their children, their vacations, the books they read, the clothes they wear. It's tempting to study what others do and err on one side or the other of the comparison spectrum. Either we will feel superior when we notice someone struggling in an area in which we excel, or we will begin to doubt our own giftings when we see someone who seems to be doing particularly well. "I'm not artsy or creative," we'll think. "So I

can't possibly be a super-engaging mom like Willow. Look at all the amazing hands-on projects she does with her children.” Or “I’m not organized like Suzy. Surely my kids would be better off if I had more labeled bins in my pantry.”

Of course, the truth is that while we are *all* created in God’s image, he has graciously granted us different aspects of his nature, and that is where the sameness ends. And praise the Lord for that! The world would be a chaotic place with all art projects and no organization. Likewise, it would be a very dull place indeed with only label makers and no creative free play.

Excellent motherhood in Christ is achievable through a myriad of biblically sound paths. That is freeing news! We do not have to be slaves to the culture of mediocre motherhood, which says, “I stank at motherhood today. You too?” We do not have to find solace in the knowledge that wine o’clock is coming (I am not objecting to wine specifically but rather the dependence on it). We do not have to find our identity in fist bumps of solidarity with similarly burned-out moms. Fist bumps are awesome and burnout is real. And there is nothing wrong with acknowledging the hard and seeking encouragement.



*We do not have to be slaves to the culture  
of mediocre motherhood, which says,  
“I stank at motherhood today. You too?”*

But when our goal is validation rather than Christ, it ultimately pushes us down into the mire of self-focus and, all too often, self-pity. Jesus holds out his hand to draw us up to excellent motherhood in freedom, giving us the ability to pursue it through the unique strengths (and weaknesses) he has blessed us with. Biblical motherhood encourages us to look outside

ourselves—at our children, our homes, our husbands, our friends, and our communities at large—and find ways to overcome mediocrity and uplift each other in the spirit of a mutual (and yet gloriously varied) pursuit of righteousness.

Note: As a busy mama, I know there are many times I have read and even agreed with a chapter in a book, only to immediately dive into another task without fully processing what I have just ingested. I wanted to give you something to help your brain continue to chew on what you have read as you go about your daily responsibilities. So at the end of each chapter, I've provided a few takeaways (called "The Narrative"), some action steps, questions for personal reflection, and a prayer. I pray these tools will help you absorb the information and apply it to your life!



## The Narrative

### MEDIOCRE MOTHERHOOD

Wallows in struggles, resulting  
in prolonged anger or apathy

Sees community as a source  
of self-affirmation

Seeks approval for mediocrity

### CHRISTLIKE MOTHERHOOD

Acknowledges struggles  
but leans on the Lord for  
strength and direction

Sees community as a source of  
encouragement and wisdom

Seeks to "do better"  
through Christ



## Action Steps

- Memorize and meditate on Proverbs 11:14 (ESV): “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”
- Make a list of three Christlike mamas whom you could seek out for help and guidance.
- Unfollow accounts that glorify and glamorize snark, hopelessness, or abdication of responsibility in motherhood.



## Questions

Am I using Scripture as my standard for excellence in motherhood?

Do I feel validated when I see others struggling (and failing) in the same areas as I am?

Am I willing to make changes to my attitudes and behavior when the Holy Spirit convicts me?



## Prayer

*Lord, thank you for giving wisdom generously and without reproach to all who ask (James 1:5). May we turn to you each day in every area of our lives, including motherhood, recognizing that conformity to Christ is infinitely better than fitting in with the world.*



# No Two Good Mamas Look Alike

## KICKING COMPARISON AND EMBRACING OUR GIFTINGS IN CHRIST

I host a workout group at my home for a troop of mamas who have become some of my dearest friends and most kindred spirits. I've been a fitness instructor for fifteen years, but this group came about seemingly serendipitously (although I can clearly see God's handiwork in it now). Several years ago, while on a girls' trip to Joanna Land (a.k.a. Magnolia) with some new friends from a church we had recently started attending, I listened as several expressed a desire for regular workout accountability. Gym membership fees were prohibitive for some, lack of childcare for others, and personal motivation for all. Suddenly, a thought popped into my mind, and before I could examine it too closely, I blurted out, "If I offered my home for classes, would any of you be interested in coming?" And almost all of them immediately blurted back, "Yes!"

### **A Sisterhood of Encouragement**

And thus began our home workout group—attended by up to ten ladies (and *all* their offspring), but with a rock-solid core group of five. It has been one of the biggest blessings of my life in recent years. We have all grown to

know and love each other more as we sweat, eat lunches, plan playdates, and chase babies. *Together*. All these women represent my fervent prayers with skin on them—the incarnate answers to years of beseeching God for genuine community. (I really do mean *years*, friends. If you’re still praying for this kind of sisterhood, don’t give up.)

But do you know what I love most about this group? No two of us are alike. Two are moms of three whose kids attend public school. Two of us, a mama of four and I, homeschool. One has children who attend a private school, even though her husband is a public school principal. Some of us vaccinate; some do not. Some of us slather our children in crunchy-granola hippie goop (a.k.a. essential oils), and others think that’s quackery. But we have *never once* had an argument about the “best” way to school our children or treat their illnesses or correct an attitude. I kid you not. We have shared strategies, prayed over each other, and learned from one another, but we have never clashed, because we know that each of us loves our children unequivocally and desires God’s best for them. We also recognize that each of us has specific strengths and weaknesses that uniquely gift us to excel in certain areas while limiting our abilities in others. It’s such a beautiful example of Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV), which says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

This spirit of camaraderie and encouragement is rare, even among genuine Christians. As someone who prayed all the more intensely for this kind of support group because of comparison and competition-filled relationships in my past, I can personally attest to the joy and freedom that comes with watching others walk in their own unique callings as mothers.

And because we have each other’s best interests at heart, we don’t hesitate to give a shout-out to one another for the things we do well. I remember receiving a text from one member of the group that came at the perfect time. I was twenty-three weeks pregnant with Titus and Tobias at the time and feeling tired and hormonal. We had had an unusually busy week of



errands and appointments, and the laundry was piling up while my toilets got grungier by the day. Nothing drove this reality deeper into my brain than the sparkling floors and pristine baseboards of a friend's house we visited that week. Even though I knew she had outside cleaning help (and I did not) and even though she's a dear friend whom I admire greatly, I was letting my hormonal emotions drag me into the pit of comparison. "What's wrong with you, Halberstadt?" (Not sure why I sometimes mentally refer to myself by my last name like a crotchety high school football coach.) "Why can't you get your act together and have everything as constantly spick-and-span as she does?"

There were some obvious answers beyond the cleaning lady. She wasn't pregnant with twins. She has fewer kids and a smaller house. She was aware that people were coming over to her house, so comparing her "company-ready" status to my "middle-of-the-day mess" was unfair. And she has a meticulous, orderly, clean-loving personality (while also having an incredible heart for hospitality). I enjoy having a clean home and strive for neatness and order, but it is not something that comes completely naturally to me. I have to work at it; she can't function without it.

In short, she and I are different people. There are many things I can learn from her example, but I cannot exchange personalities with her, nor should I want to, since that is an affront to the ways in which God has uniquely crafted me.

But back to that timely text I mentioned. After one of our exercise sessions at my house, a regular attendee sent me this message: "Just in case I haven't said it recently, being in your home is always so refreshing. I really do sigh as I drive in your driveway. Thank you for being so hospitable."

What a kind thing to say, right? And what an affirmation of the hospitality that I *knew* the Lord wanted us to offer when we spent two years building this house with our own hands while raising a passel of babies. I immediately felt my silly stresses about not measuring up to my friend's gleaming house standards fall away. The Lord can still use my home to bless others, even if the shower grout needs scrubbing and there are dishes in the sink.

## Walking Through the Narrow Gate of Our God-Given Calling

Conversely, I can't tell you how many times I've received a message through one of my blog channels expressing despair at ever measuring up to *my* standards. "I'm so overwhelmed with two kids, and you make it look so easy with five times that many," they'll say. Or "I don't know *how* you find time to exercise on top of everything else."

Here's the thing: I'm one of those weirdos who love to exercise. It is life-giving to me. It also helps me have more energy and a better attitude toward my family. I'm willing to wake up early to do it (I teach morning fitness classes before 6:00 a.m.) or endure inconvenience to make it happen (I have done many a kickboxing session at my home while ducking and weaving around three or four small humans like a considerably less cool Bruce Lee in one of his famous "group fight" scenes). But it doesn't mean that other things don't feel like too much to me. So this is what I tell these precious, freaked out, discouraged mamas: "Everything you see me doing well is either the result of a natural personality bent or years of the Lord's molding my weaknesses into something that more closely resembles the way I was uniquely designed to reflect his image."

He's not done with me yet, and I know he's not done with you either. Seek him. Ask his guidance about where your time is best spent. Follow through when he provides direction, even if it's not your favorite. Even when it's hard. Because hard is not the same thing as bad. (You'll read this phrase more than once in this book.) You will see growth. You will see progress. He will sustain you through it. Never compare your beginning or middle to anyone else's *anything*. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all good mama.



*Never compare your beginning or middle to anyone else's anything. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all good mama.*

Maybe the Lord has given you a passion for coupon clipping (which makes my brain hurt), running a hobby farm (So. Much. Work.), or mentoring younger women (now *this* I love!). Maybe writing a blog sounds utterly overwhelming but baking bread to deliver to neighbors doesn't. Maybe volunteering isn't feasible but being a prayer warrior is.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20 ESV).

“Drinking of one Spirit” may sound kind of mystical, but really all it means is that as Christians, we all get our marching orders, varied as they are in their particulars, from the same source. If you are a believer, the only other “people” who truly need to approve of your mothering are God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. So when we are tempted to self-flagellate because we can't find time to make kombucha or homemade sourdough like our neighbor, may we instead remind ourselves that “whether [we] eat or drink or whatever [we] do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Jill Churchill, a mystery novelist, famously said, “There's no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one.” It's no mystery (ha, see what I did there?) she is one smart cookie. Of course, we have only to overhear a mom gripe session in the grocery store, observe a toxic, jealousy-fueled relationship between two mamas, or as I talked about in the last



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1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

chapter, take a peek at popular social media accounts to discover just how many ways there are to be a mediocre mama too.

Being bad at fitting in a daily workout does not make you a mediocre mama. Being a less than creative home chef does not make you a mediocre mama. Being a late riser does not make you a mediocre mama.

But shirking? Complaining? Participating in the “mommy wars” of shaming and one-upping? Ignoring our God-given callings?

All of these are at least warning signals that we are succumbing to the pressure to conform to the world’s mediocre standards rather than God’s excellent ones. This path may provide brief flashes of justification—“At least I’m not doing *that*,” or “See, she struggles with the same thing”—but it will never fill us with a lasting assurance that we are walking in the narrow way, the only one that promises *life*.

For it was Jesus himself who commanded us to “enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

I know this is a verse about salvation, but I don’t think that I’m taking it *too* far out of context to also apply it to the ways in which we continue in that salvation on a path of righteousness.

You’ve probably figured out by now that I don’t think every single “narrow gate” of motherhood will have the same initials stamped on it. In fact, if it doesn’t have your name on it, I highly encourage you to keep on walking without even looking at what’s going on in that particular pasture. But when you find your gate, you must walk through it and stay the course. Motherhood is so much more than feel-good affirmations that there is no wrong way to mother (spoiler alert: There is). That platitude has been the undoing of too many well-meaning, tired moms for me to treat it as anything other than the dangerous untruth it is.



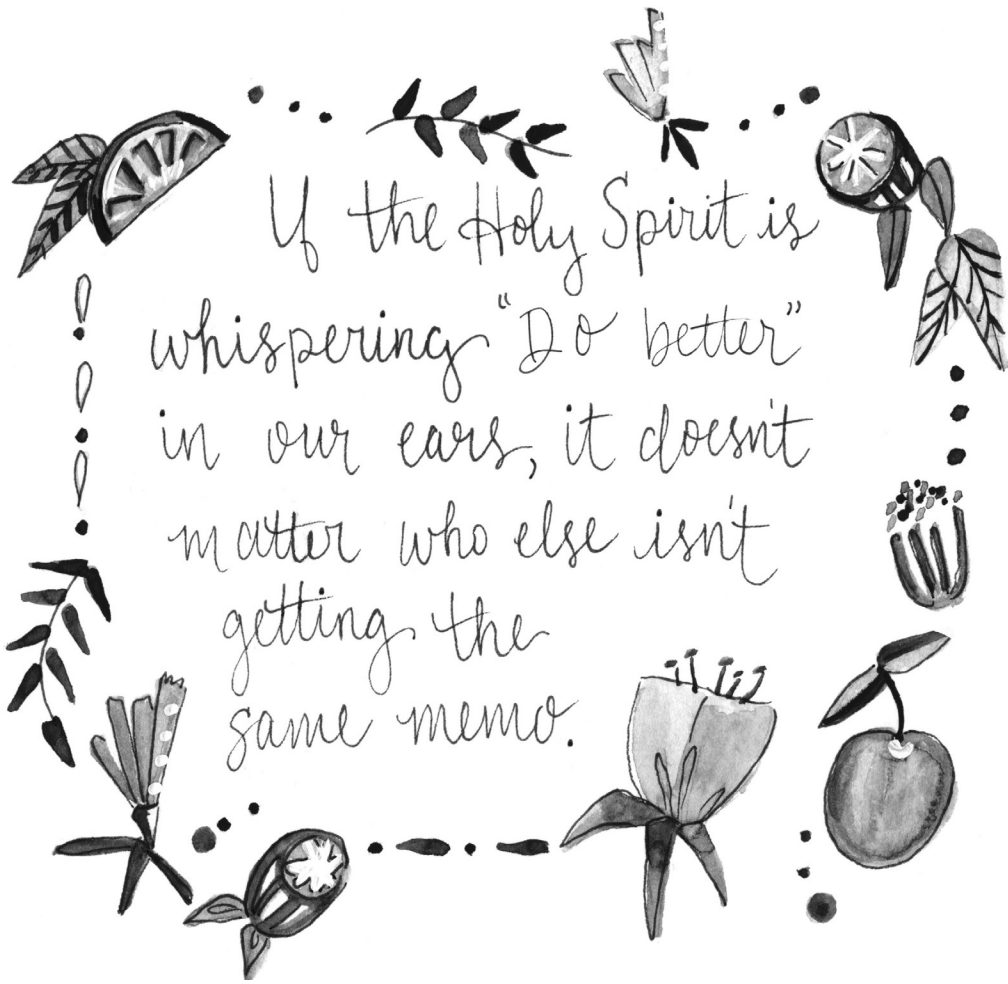
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In fact, James 4:17 (ESV) says, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Like, whoa. Am I saying that *inaction* can be sin? Yep. When the Lord leads us to our very own narrow gate emblazoned with our name in bold sans serif font, if we peer beyond, notice some craters in the road, and think, “Nah, I’m good, Lord. Thanks, but I’ll stay right here in my comfortable place,” we are literally committing sin.

In other words, when I said that being bad at fitting in workouts doesn’t make you a mediocre mom, it was true—*unless* you have a conviction from the Lord that your health needs to be more of a priority. The same is true of meals, bedtimes and rising times, how we dress, who we spend time with, and the list goes on. If the Holy Spirit is whispering “Do better” in our ears, it doesn’t really matter how many times or in how many ways we shove him away. It doesn’t matter who else *isn’t* getting the same memo. We will never have peace until we address those areas of growth. And anything resembling peace that we do achieve while tuning out the gentle nudging of God’s Spirit will be a false sense of comfort balanced precariously on a foundation of sin.

I know, I know. I kind of dropped the hammer there. But while it may feel like I’ve shifted gears from “I’m okay, you’re okay” to “Sin, *sin*, SIN!” the reality is that a recognition of our giftings and a willingness to actually walk in them are two very different things. Because the ultimate issue is not whether God can use us in unique ways to bless our families (he can) but whether we are too focused on what others are doing or too focused on making excuses about our insecurities to follow through on his leading.

Yes, there are a million different ways to be a good mom. But in which areas has the Lord given us special gifts, and are we actually receiving them? Neither the world nor our friends nor our mom can answer this question for



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us. Only we can. Saying yes to God's leading takes a great deal more courage than choosing either defeat or a sense of false superiority. And answering his calling, rather than trying to measure up to our peers, is the only guaranteed way of being the best mamas we possibly can be.



## The Narrative

### MEDIOCRE MOTHERHOOD

Gets bogged down in the details of what others are doing

Makes excuses based on others' "performances"

Lives in fear of failure

### CHRISTLIKE MOTHERHOOD

Makes the most of the talents we've been given

Takes responsibility for improving on weaknesses

Rests in Christ's "enoughness"



## Action Steps

- Memorize and meditate on 2 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV): "Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding."
- Make a list of three things the Lord has given you the ability to do well and three things you struggle with.
- Choose one thing you can do this week to exercise a particular gifting and one thing you can do to strengthen an area in which you are weak.





## Questions

Am I avoiding community because I'm afraid I won't measure up?

Do I tend to look down on others who aren't "performing" as well as I am?

Am I using my giftings to bless my children and others?



## Prayer

*Lord, you say in your Word that those who compare and measure themselves by others for their worth are not wise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Please help us to be grateful for the things you've made us good at and willing to work on the areas in which we struggle.*

