

# LIGHT



Celebrating  
Motherhood



*Light & Love*

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## LIGHT

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Editorial:

# Honoring Mom

by Richard Clark Jr.



**T**he young mother, living on an old farmstead in Kansas, was deeply discouraged. This mid-January day, she had about given up hope as a Christian. As a

mother of three small children, she struggled with feeling inadequate. How could God ever save her? A predawn walk on the lonely country roads near her little family's mobile home provided quiet time to pour out her heart to God.

This walk became the turning point in her Christian experience. In the quiet darkness of early morning, God's presence became very real. He helped her understand that He loved her not because of any worthiness or righteousness on her part but because she was His "baby." That was a truth her mother's heart could readily grasp.

God also encouraged this young mother and impressed her with two key verses in Scripture that memorable morning. "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out," Jesus promised (John 6:37, NKJV). He also said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20, KJV).

This experience is an anchor point in my mother's walk with God, which she remembers and celebrates to this day.

## **MOM'S MISSION FIELD**

God gave me a mother who is wonderfully caring and present in the lives of her children and grandchildren. Now retired, Mom and Dad



have been able to divide their time across widely separated states, visiting their four children and three grandchildren. Daily, Mom texts encouraging Bible promises to my siblings and me, with family and nature pictures she has taken and the assurance that she is praying for us — individually.

Not only did Mom care for our childhood bumps and scrapes — she is a registered nurse. Throughout our lives, she has been a health educator in our home and community, emphasizing healthful living. She homeschooled my three younger siblings and me, which, in the case of my siblings, was for practically their entire pre-college years. The tragic loss of my parents' youngest child due to miscarriage prompted Mom to begin homeschooling. In this way, she could have us especially near in her time of profound grief. Being a homeschool family proved to be a great blessing to all of us.

Mom's miscarriage happened when my family lived on the opposite side of the world from her supportive parents. She did not have easy communication with them because of technology limitations. But through the loss and grief, God further expanded Mom's sphere of care and mission. She became a mother figure to many young people who were motherless or who, in other ways, needed a mother's counsel and support. Since Dad was

a college chemistry professor, many of the “children” Mom figuratively adopted were college students. And our family continues to grow as Mom “adopts” more children.

Mom is an accomplished church musician specializing in piano and organ. She is also a talented vocalist. A special joy of hers is to give free music lessons to children from church and her neighborhood, hoping they, too, will one day serve God as church pianists and organists. In fact, one 6-year-old student currently plays the piano interlude during the worship service when the children of the church come to the front for the children’s story. Mom does not limit her training to piano and organ. She also blends vocal performance, Bible and nature study, and fundamental health principles into her lessons. Mom has written many songs for Bible instruction and Scripture memorization and composed the theme song for an international Christian mission organization.

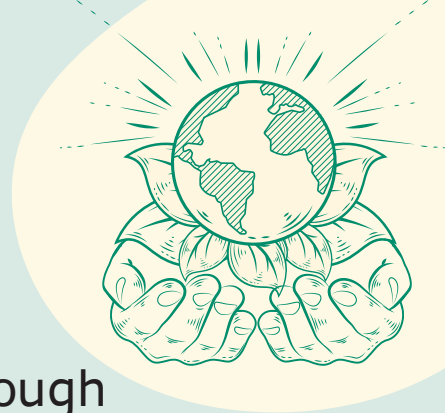
As part of her personal devotions, Mom writes poetry. She then loves to share brightly colored pages of her poems, interspersed with nature pencil drawings, with the people she meets throughout her day. “I write poetry about what God does for me,” she explains, sharing a page or two with the store cashier or the janitor at a rest stop. That brings her special joy, too. Here’s one example:



## I'll Trade

by Jancie Lee Wilson Clark

Well, Lord, here's my worry.  
I'll trade it in for praise:  
Thank You that You'll see me through  
This current stressful phase!  
You have loving power, Lord,  
You built Earth in six days!  
Here's my worry ... now I choose  
To spend my thoughts in praise!



## REMEMBRANCE

My mother, now a grandmother with a smile-creased face, is once again at the old Kansas farmstead. She isn't able to visit often, but when she does, she loves to walk by herself down the quiet country roads to pray and ponder. She remembers one special mid-January day and basks in her heavenly Father's love.

## REFLECTING ON MOTHERHOOD

The fifth commandment advises, "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Deuteronomy 5:16). However, for some, honoring their mother — or a mother figure — may be painful. Scripture speaks of mothers who forget and forsake their own children. For

those who experience devastating pain like this, the Bible affirms God's unfailing love and care. "When my father and my mother forsake me," David sang, "then the LORD will take care of me" (Psalm 27:10, NKJV). "Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you," declares the "God of all comfort" (Psalm 49:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3).

Five essays on mothers and motherhood comprise this edition of *Light*. "Just a Mom?" by Tammy Darling emphasizes the noble and significant role of being a mother. "The problem," she writes, "with labeling ourselves 'just a mom' is that a label doesn't define who we are — Christ does." In "Mother of Valor," Ray McAllister explores the "woman of noble character" from Proverbs 31, highlighting the strength, wisdom, and nurturing qualities of mothers who honor God and meet their children's needs. Sophia Jaquez's humorous reflections in "Unheeded Advice, Endless Love" give practical and spiritual lessons learned after disregarding her mother's guidance. In "When Doubt Meets Desire: Trusting the Lord With My Dream of Motherhood," Rhianna McGregor Hajzer details her journey of balancing her deep desire for motherhood with the doubts and challenges posed by her blindness, ultimately finding strength and trust in the Lord's plan. This edition's final essay, "Unexpected Motherhood: A Story of Loss, Love, and Finding God's Purpose" by Tina Neeley, recounts Frances Clark's journey



of embracing motherhood, raising children who were not her own with unwavering faith and love, and finding her true calling in God's plan.



As you read this edition, though it will arrive a bit after what's officially designated as Mother's Day in the United States, I invite you to reflect and appreciate the moms and maternal figures in your lives. If your heart is tender because of current or past hurts, may the Lord lead you on the path to peace and, as He wills it, reconciliation. If you are a mother, grandmother, aunt, or mom-mentor, I pray the Lord will bless you with wisdom, strength, and courage as you equip and guide those in your sphere of influence.

"The LORD bless you and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

***Richard Clark Jr. is the assistant editor and Bible school coordinator at Christian Record Services in Lincoln, Nebraska.***

# Just a Mom?

by Tammy Darling



**R**ecently, a good friend confided she was struggling with being “just a mom.” With four children, one of which has special



needs, this stay-at-home mother is anything but just a mom. The conversation provided me with the opportunity to speak into her life.

As a stay-at-home mom of four myself, though 15 years older, I've been where she's at. I, too, have struggled with being just a mom. Honestly, sometimes I still do. I have other titles: wife, homeschool teacher, and freelance writer. But the "mom" title always gets to me the most.

Maybe you can relate. Perhaps you find yourself struggling to put dinner on the table and get a shower on the same day. It could be you're fishing toys out of the toilet or picking peas out of ears. On those days, you realize the phrase "well-behaved toddler" is an oxymoron.

These are the formative years, the ones that are so very important. What you're doing now sets the stage for the years to come.

Maybe you're a little farther along on the parenting spectrum. Pre-teens and teenagers are just as capable of making us want to scream. We don't, lest the neighbors hear us and call the cops or our children have us committed ... whichever comes first.

Your presence is crucial in these years, too, though your kiddos are unlikely to admit it at this age. Believe that they want you around, want to talk, and even want to hang out sometimes ... because deep down, they do.

# GIFTS FROM GOD

I think we intrinsically know motherhood is a noble calling. “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all” (Proverbs 31:29, NIV). Yet, we feel so lacking, so incompetent, so unqualified.

Do our children ever hear or take to heart anything we say? So often, we feel like we’re wasting our time, energy, and sanity.

Break up a sibling squabble. Administer discipline. Discuss biblical principles. Repeat as needed — and it will be needed. On and on it goes ... day after day, year after year.

Even so, Deuteronomy 6:6-7 instructs, “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Yep. Sounds like a daily repeat to me.

We wonder if anything we say matters. (It does.) We worry we’re raising the next prodigal son. (Maybe, but God can bring him back home, too.) We hope there’s more to life than this. (There is. It’s a matter of perspective.)

You long for a clean house, a clean car, and clean kids — and not necessarily in that order. “Clean anything” feels like a dream, a distant memory you can’t grasp. You may have



laundry scattered in every room of the house, school backpacks threatening to obliterate the kitchen counter, and wads of crumpled paper strewn about the living room floor. OK, that last one may be me and my own doing as a writer. You also have some awesome kids. So do I.

Let's be honest: Even on their worst day — and ours — we wouldn't trade our kids for the world. I would not, however, be opposed to swapping for a day or two. Just saying.

All kidding aside, we know our kids are gifts from God. Sometimes, we lose sight of the fact. And all this from a God with a sense of humor. Why else would I receive a rock for Mother's Day? (Yes, I did. "Mommy, it's so beautiful! Just like you.")

Your kids love you. They really do. If you're anything like I was in those early parenting years, you haven't been to the restroom by yourself in the last three years, minimum. That's how much your kids love you.

The fact that my idea of a perfect meal is one I didn't cook doesn't make me a bad mom. The fact that you removed your kids' bedroom doors so they can't be slammed doesn't make you a bad mother, either. I'm warming up to that one; however, I'm unsure how I can effectively preserve my sanity if I can't occasionally banish my kids behind those doors.

As a mom, there are moments when you may feel invisible. You may even wish you were invisible — this alone would afford some bathroom privacy.

Child 1: “Where’s Mom?”

Child 2: “I don’t know. Hey! Why’s the toilet seat lumpy?!” OK, the whole invisible mom thing is a bad idea.

The problem with labeling ourselves “just a mom” is that a label doesn’t define who we are — Christ does. In an age where value is often determined by how many Facebook “friends” we have, being a mom seems so common, so unimportant. But truly, we know better.

You may or may not have a college degree — my friend and I don’t, but we can kiss boo-boos like nobody’s business. No one can kiss your child’s boo-boos like you can, Ph.D. or not. Don’t let the world define success for you. Ask God what He has to say on the matter.

## ROLL WITH IT

As moms, we must learn to roll with it. Sometimes, God has a different plan for the day than we do. And that’s OK. Really. The fact that you don’t check off every item on your to-do list will not affect the world’s equilibrium or prevent your children from becoming what God created them to be.

It is you God has entrusted to love, care for, nurture, and train the children you have. No one, besides God, will ever love your children more than you do.

Looking in the mirror, I see a mom who doesn't have it all together. Maybe you see the same. Perhaps you think you're just a mom. Let me tell you what I conveyed to my friend and what I tell myself during these mirror moments: "You are not just a mom. You are so much more." Receive it. Believe it. Repeat it daily, if necessary.

Let me encourage you, moms: We are not just survivors. We are conquerors. As God's kids, "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

What about those other moms who seem to have it all together? It's just an illusion. People wear masks; they portray what they want you to see, what they want to be in their own minds. Imagine the blessing we could be to one another if we removed the masks and became real, openly sharing our struggles and encouraging one another.

As a mother, I fall short every day. I argue with my children, yell at them, and behave in ways I swore I never would. I compare myself to other mothers, wondering if I'll ever measure up.

I even wonder why God ever chose me to be a mother, and then I thank Him profusely that He did. His love and grace cover all my failures, shortcomings, and sins.

## MORE THAN ENOUGH

We moms certainly have plenty. Plenty to do. Plenty to worry about. Plenty of people wanting our time and attention. But God gives us plenty more. Plenty of grace. Plenty of strength. Plenty of love to cover a multitude of mistakes.

We don't need gifts on Mother's Day — unless you really want to start a rock collection. Perhaps all we need is a fresh perspective on the gifts we've already been given.

Motherhood is nothing short of an adventure. Too often, though, we see it as a mind-numbing, thankless job where the proverbial empty nest gets better looking every day. It really is OK to take five minutes to sit in your car singing your favorite song at the top of your lungs. In fact, I recommend it.

Trust God. Trust His plan. Every day will not be Disneyland. There will be trials, even pain, but these are the moments in which we grow the most.

We've all heard the advice, "Enjoy your children. They grow up so fast." Just as we think, "Not fast enough," they grow up right



before our eyes. One day, they're cruising the backyard in a battery-operated Jeep. The next day, they're lapping the block in a Chevy Cavalier. So, the advice stands. Enjoy them. Now.

Delight in the beautiful gifts God has given you. Rejoice in their uniqueness. Embrace them while you can.

Looking back over the years since my first daughter was born and then three more following her, I shudder to think how my life would have been without them. I cannot imagine a life where they do not exist.

Motherhood isn't about status or labels. It isn't about raising angelic Einsteins. It's about the love of family, of sharing Christ with our kids. Just a mom? I don't think so.

***Tammy Darling writes frequently for Light from rural Pennsylvania and is the mother of four beautiful adult daughters. She recently found out she's going to be a grandmother for the first time ... to a girl.***

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# *Motherly*

by Richard Clark Jr.  
Answers from the NIV.

## Across

1. "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no \_\_\_ on the child she has borne?" (Isaiah 49:15).

5. "Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her \_\_\_ was healed at that moment" (Matthew 15:28).

10. "How often I have \_\_\_ to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Matthew 23:37).

11. "'Honor your father and mother' — which is the first \_\_\_ with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2).

13. "His mother said to the servants, 'Do \_\_\_ He tells you'" (John 2:5).

15. "And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was \_\_\_ to bear children" (Hebrews 11:11).

17. "Just as a \_\_\_ mother cares for her children, so we cared for you" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

18. "I will \_\_\_ with those who \_\_\_ with you, and your children I will save" (Isaiah 49:25).

19. "The sayings of King \_\_\_ — an inspired utterance his mother taught him"

(Proverbs 31:1).

20. "When Jesus saw His mother there, and the \_\_\_ whom He loved standing nearby, He said to her, 'Woman, here is your son'" (John 19:26).

## Down

1. "Greet Rufus, \_\_\_ in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too" (Romans 16:13).

2. "I will bless her so that she will be the mother of \_\_\_" (Genesis 17:16).

3. "But when her baby is born she \_\_\_ the anguish because of her joy " (John 16:21).

4. "But the \_\_\_ that is above is free, and she is our mother" (Galatians 4:26).

6. "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has \_\_\_ me what I asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:27).

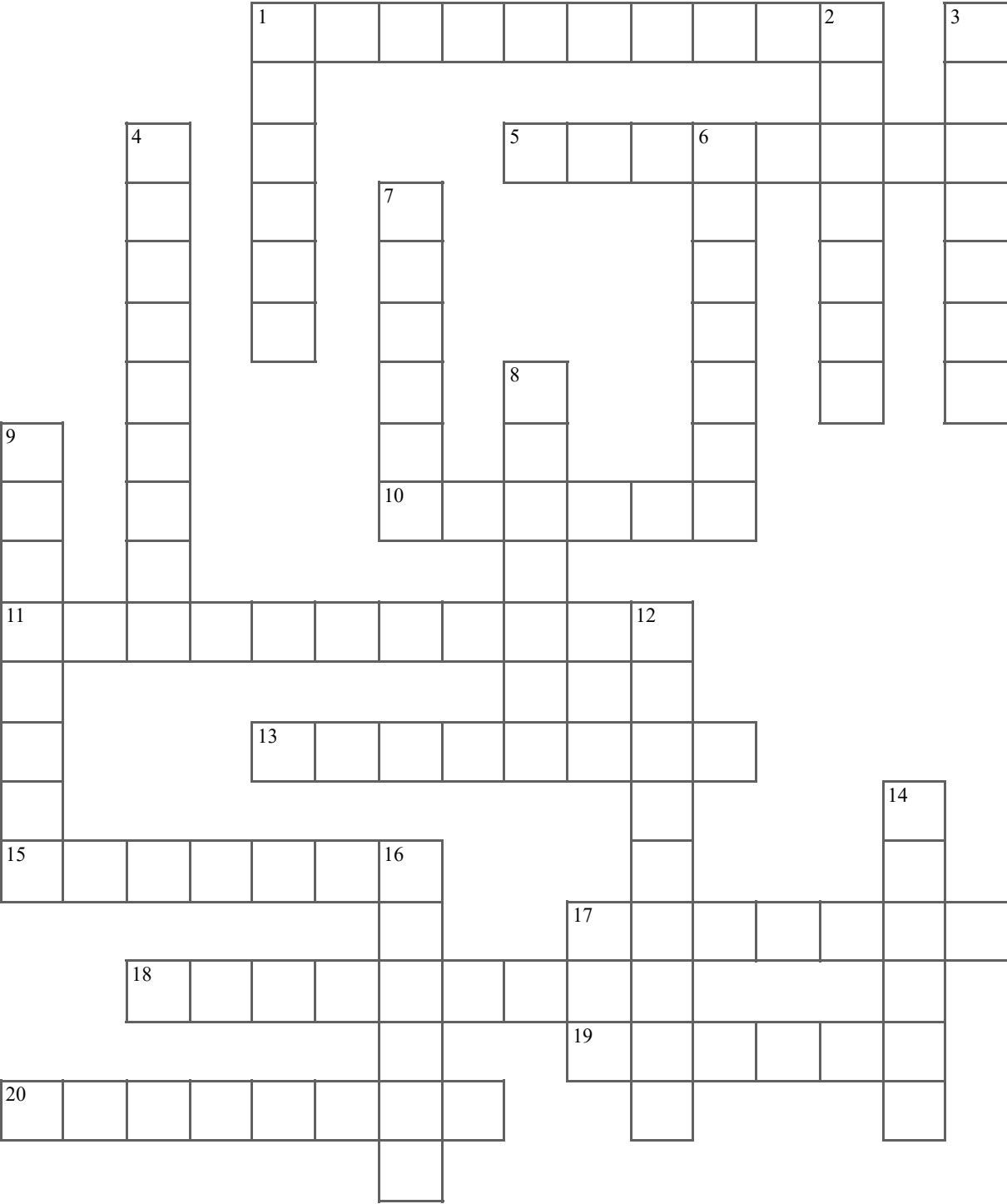
7. "May she who gave you birth be \_\_\_!" (Proverbs 23:25).

8. "I am reminded of your \_\_\_ faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5).

9. "He replied, 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into \_\_\_'" (Luke 8:21).

12. "His mother \_\_\_ all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

14. "He \_\_\_ leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11).



Answers on page 47



# Mother of Valor

by Ray McAllister



**C**ould mothers have been heroes long before heroes were heroes? Can a nurturing maternal figure be found in someone other than a biological mother? How can we celebrate moms all year? In the following paragraphs, we will explore the blessing and beauty of biblical motherhood, primarily as described in the wisdom literature of Proverbs.

## **WHAT DOES PROVERBS SAY?**

Let's begin our journey at the end — that is, the end of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 31 has much to say about motherhood. Let's look at verse 1: "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him" (NASB 1995). Right here, we see something striking. This oracle is a message this man's mother taught him. This may make Proverbs 31 a Bible chapter authored by a woman since King Lemuel copied the passage based on what he memorized at his mother's hand. This passage shows the importance of a good mother teaching a child in the ways of the Lord. It's one of the most important tasks of a good mother, and this must not be overlooked.

Further insights on motherhood can be derived from Proverbs 31:10-31. As a Hebrew scholar, I find the literature of this passage to be the most striking, and what is incredibly

impressive about it is that it gets lost in translation. The Hebrew alphabet contains 22 letters, and the first letter of each of these 22 verses follows a path through the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 10, for example, begins with "aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 11 begins with "beth," the second letter, and so on. In other words, this passage deals with the issue, as we might say, "from A to Z."

Another matter that gets lost in translation is the proper rendering of the Hebrew at the beginning of verse 10. The King James Version calls the subject "a virtuous woman." The New American Standard Bible calls her "an excellent wife." Neither of these nor any translation I've read do this idea justice. Simply put, whenever the word "virtue" or "excellent" is used when referring to a man, the text talks about the men of war, valor, or soldiers. Therefore, the Hebrew term in verse 10 is "a woman of valor" or "a woman of strength."

Much of this passage concerns a woman of valor as a wife, but there are references to aspects of good motherhood. Let's look at a few of these references briefly. Verse 15 mentions she rises at night and prepares food for her household. Verse 21 states she does not fear snow and cold weather since her household is well-clothed. These verses make clear that a good mother meets her children's needs.

Verse 26 presents an intriguing insight: "She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." This could be applied to a mother training her children in wisdom and compassion. Then, there's verse 28: "Her children rise up and bless her." Finally, verse 30 declares, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."

These concepts summarize the passage by noting that a woman who honors God is worthy of the praise she receives from her children.

## PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

My mom was a "mother of valor" when I was a boy. Yes, she prepared meals and saw to it I had enough clothing. The idea of meeting the needs of the children has a special application in my situation. I had limited eyesight as a young boy and became totally blind at age 12. My mother worked hard to prepare me for life and certainly fit the "mother of valor" description in handling this. She repeatedly reminded me never to let anyone say I couldn't do something. She helped teach me to read and write braille, ensuring I spent 15 minutes reading braille each school day. She also saw that I received piano lessons, so I would be good at music.

She fits the description of a mother of valor



with my spiritual development. Mom read Bible stories to me daily and prayed with me at bedtime. When I was tiny, I remember her training led me to say that I want to give God a big hug when I get to heaven.

God gave us mothers and mother figures to enrich our lives in so many ways.

I recall her dedicated efforts to impart the value of compassion to me. In elementary school, we had the chance to purchase some interesting refrigerator magnets. Mom noted that there were children in parts of the world who didn't have enough to eat. We didn't have much money, so we couldn't spend money on both. As she told me, giving money to help these children might enable them to get an extra bowl of rice. I remember choosing to help the children. I do not remember any interesting magnets arriving in the mail. It felt good to be able to make a difference.

In an effort to rise up and bless her, I have composed poems for her, expressed my affection verbally, and arranged for flowers to be delivered to her on multiple occasions. She was a woman who feared the Lord, and I've done my best to honor that.

Another mother figure was my mother-in-law. "Momma," as I'd often call her to

distinguish her from my birth mother, was elderly when I met her, and I knew her until her death. As Ruth was with Naomi, I bonded with Momma as an adult and found it a life-changing experience. I noted how she honored God and wanted to attend church whenever possible. When she could no longer, my wife and I brought church to Momma's care home.

My way of rising up and blessing Momma was to hug her every time we saw her. I often made jokes about it, asking if she was ready for "a bug, a rug, a mug, a tug, or a hug." Momma found the game amusing and cute. Then there was the time when somehow the hug didn't happen. On the drive home, Momma expressed to my wife how regrettable it was that she forgot my hug. I have many fond memories of Momma that will last the rest of my life.

God gave us mothers and mother figures to enrich our lives in so many ways. We can praise the beauty, wisdom, and love they bring in every situation God sends us. I invite you to reach out to the mothers of valor in your life and tell them how much they mean to you. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God, thanking Him for these influential individuals. Such blessings will be with you forever.

***Ray McAllister is a frequent contributor to Light magazine from Berrien Center, Michigan.***



# Unheeded Advice, Endless Love

by Sophia Jaquez

“Don’t touch that!”  
“Put your coat on.”  
“Don’t play with matches!”

Moms give the best advice, don’t they? We can imagine touching, heartfelt moments when children sit with their parents and receive guidance that will improve their lives forever. They laugh. They cry. These youngsters take a mental picture of the scene to recall the

cherished words forever. They go straight to that advice, locked in their hearts and waiting to save them whenever they are in a bind. What a beautiful story.

This is not that story.

Here are four of my mother's top pieces of advice and how I did not listen. I view myself as an independent individual, although I recognize that my actions can sometimes be characterized by a high degree of spontaneity. My learning process is 1% instruction and 99% trial and error. Observe in the following stories how that has worked out for me.

### **Mom's Advice #1: Think Before You Act**

I was raised by a hardworking father and a dedicated stay-at-home mother. With my two younger brothers, our household was always in peak chaos. "Think before you act" was such a common phrase my brother thought it was a Bible verse. It was often used in juxtaposition with questions such as "Why would you cover the dog in mud?" and "Did you think hiding my glasses was funny?" Pausing before taking action was a habit my mother struggled to ingrain. It didn't sink in as quickly as she would have liked.

"She's Rapunzel," sighed my mother as she sat by my father at the end of a long day. My brothers and I had finally gone to bed.

"More like Shirley Temple," replied Dad. "Just



look at those curls.”

“Either way, her hair is a battle,” Mom said. “Every morning, she screams when I brush it, and every night, she cries when I take out the hair ties. Who knew a 4-year-old could have that much hair?”

“Maybe we should shave her head,” Dad playfully suggested. Little did they know I was lying silently in bed contemplating the same thing.

When evening came the following day, Mom trudged into the bathroom for our nightly ritual.

“Time to take out your pigtails!” I donned a determined face as I marched onto the tile floor. I studied my mother as she struggled with the hair tie.

“Don’t worry about it, Mommy. I got this.” I strode out of the room with the confidence of a seasoned hairdresser. Moments later, I returned holding an entire pigtail in my tiny fist like a bouquet of flowers.

“See, Mom? I fixed it,” I announced proudly. Mom was unsure whether to laugh or cry, so she did both.

## **Mom’s Advice #2: Put on Your Shoes Before You Go Outside**

The previously described Jaquez family circus is located on a small acreage. This property



came with woods, a creek, a field of dead grass, a myriad of shockingly brave wildlife, and mounds of debris. We tried to clear out as much trash as possible, but with 15 acres, removing it all was impossible. Thus, my mom's second great piece of advice: Put on your shoes before you go outside.

We begin our tale on a bright summer day. Eight-year-old Sophia is trekking through the woods, her tennis shoes lying on the house floor a mile behind her. Why did she leave her shoes? Who is to say? Maybe she aspired to be at one with nature. Perhaps she wanted her brothers to know she was tough. Possibly, it's because mom told her to wear them. Whatever the reason, Sophia found herself barefoot in a vast forest of trees and rusty nails.

The incident happened during a brilliantly executed dismount from a rotten log. Sophia jumped! She twirled! She landed — YEOW!

Mom heard the scream from a mile away. That nail lodged itself in the exact center of my heel. It really was a glorious "feat." My reward? A tetanus shot and a pair of crutches.

### **Mom's Advice #3: Never Give Up**

My junior year of university was spent in the Andes Mountains of Colombia as a student missionary. I called my mom every week, no matter how hard it got, and she always gave

me this advice: Never give up.

This really came in handy regarding my first big decision on this trip: I started exercising. Most of the volunteers for our organization were walking billboards of health and fitness. They regularly worked out at local gyms and tracks, on the roof of our apartment building, and basically anywhere and everywhere.

On my day off, a couple weeks into my time there, I groggily stumbled into the kitchen. I glanced at one of these “perfect” bodies exercising on our living room floor. *That could be me*, I mused, wiping cookie crumbs from my pajama bottoms. Pamplona, Colombia, has an elevation of 7,500 feet. My hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, has an elevation of 1,201 feet. So, of course, I thought it would be logical to take up running.

As one of the three Caucasian people in Pamplona, I regularly got a ton of attention when walking down the crowded streets. People stared, cat-called, honked, and repeated the one phrase they knew in English. If I was a phenomenon before, running turned me into a full-fledged spectacle. Women pointed. Buses stopped. Children turned to their fathers in awe to figure out why this soaking wet, red-faced, wheezing, human-shaped thing was plodding up an impossibly steep hill. At one point, a street vendor asked what I was running from.

Another asked why I had been stopped in front of his churro stand for 20 minutes, staring at his food. The morning after my first run, I rolled out of bed and discovered neither of my legs supported my weight.

“That’s it,” I thought. “Health is not worth this.” However, this time, I listened to my mom. Her words rang through my mind, and I knew I had to keep going. Nine months later, my mom called me from the finish line of my first marathon. “How are your lungs?” she asked. I just smiled.

#### **Mom’s Advice #4: Put God First**

Since the dawn of time, children have struggled to heed the warnings of the beings that brought them into this world. I parallel my experience as a disobedient child with Eve’s in the Garden of Eden. God forgave and loved her despite her disobedience, just like my mom forgives and loves me. First, God tells us what to do. Then, when we don’t take His advice, He is still there as we clean up the pieces of our self-made messes. My mom was there to brush over the bald spot on my pigtail-less head and pull the nail out of my foot. We will succeed when we listen to the Lord and follow Him, much like when I finally heeded my mother’s advice.

Through my loving mother’s actions, I understand God’s relationship with His children.

God will always love me no matter how often I disregard His rules, and He will always be there when I come crawling back to ask for forgiveness. I still end up with the

consequences of my actions, but I can rest assured that losing His love will never be one of those consequences. This brings us to my mom's final advice: Put God first.

Through my loving mother's actions, I understand God's relationship with His children.

I cannot even begin to tell you the times I have ignored this. Yet, God's love for me is so deep and so consuming that it surpasses even the unconditional love of my incredible, long-suffering mother. His merciful love that holds me through the mistakes, the falls, and the stupidity is what drives me to become a better person. I have grown into a happy and functioning adult despite these mistakes.

When I become a parent, I will be sure to teach my children the most important things my mother has taught me, the love of Jesus Christ and to put God first. I pray they will listen better than I have!

***Sophia Jaquez is a freelance writer and a recent graduate of Union Adventist University in Lincoln, Nebraska.***



# When Doubt Meets Desire:

## Trusting the Lord With My Dream of Motherhood

by Rhianna McGregor Hajzer



**O**n the top shelf of our bedroom closet, I've hidden a little pink dress and a little blue sweater. Every now and then, I bring them down, remembering the first sparks of hope that led me to buy them — not because I needed them, but because I needed something to hold while I waited. As I rub the silk of the pink bow between my fingers, I imagine holding my daughter as my husband and I dedicate her to the Lord before our church family. I smile, tracing the outline of the truck on the sweater, picturing the first moment my son will be held by his great-grandmother. My heart burns with these images — the visceral longing to become a mother and hold my baby close makes it hard to breathe. As the longing settles into a dull ache, the questions creep up the walls of my heart like ivy, squeezing until I'm overcome with doubt. So, I tuck the clothes back into the closet.

For me, the dream of motherhood is intertwined with the fear of failure. My blindness adds an extra layer of doubt, which I must overcome, not only for myself but for those around me. Many people are surprisingly confident voicing their opinions about my abilities as a blind mother. They question how, or even if, I'll be able to fulfill the responsibilities of a parent when their own ability to do so is reliant on sight. They wonder, "Can blind women be good mothers?" I believe

the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Yet, I find myself grappling with how to balance my desire for a family with the practical considerations that parenting with a visual impairment brings.

From caring for my newborn until the day they leave home as a young adult, I wonder how I’ll navigate the challenges of each stage. I’ll have to be resourceful, finding ways to adapt our lives to meet their needs and mine so we can grow and learn together. I’ll dive into research, gathering stories, techniques, and advice from able-bodied parents and those with disabilities. I’ll interview fellow blind mothers to learn how they did it — what worked and what didn’t — and, I’m sure, endure a fair amount of trial and error along the way. Although I’m determined, the questions weigh heavily on my heart, testing my problem-solving skills and mental and emotional resiliency. It isn’t only others who wonder if I can do this.

I wonder how I’ll keep my child safe. From the kitchen to crossing streets, how will I prevent accidents while allowing them to explore, make choices, and learn from their experiences?

How will friends and family respond to my needs as a blind mother? Will they be willing to fill the gaps that my blindness leaves — driving my children to choir concerts or baseball practice — or will my needs become



a burden? I also wonder how I'll handle relationships with other parents. Will they view me as incompetent because of my blindness or selfish for bringing children into a home with a disabled mother? I fear my capacity to endure the rigors of parenting, compounded by doubts about my disability and the ever-changing need to adapt, will be drained faster than I can replenish it.

The question that scares me the most — one I hardly dare voice aloud but which frightens me to the core: Will my children resent me?

Trying to answer these questions feels like fending off an arrow attack without a shield ... they just keep coming. As determined as I am to find practical solutions, I know no parent has all the answers. I can implement strategies that other blind mothers have shared, like having small children wear squeaky shoes to hear their movements, bathing regularly to stay familiar with their bodies and prevent rashes, or using the "buddy system" as they get older, with friends and other children helping to keep watch. I can also rely on tools I've gathered, like apps that connect me with sighted volunteers, my community's support, and my husband's unwavering love as we raise our children together.

The practical adaptations are only half the battle. At the core of who I am and who I hope

to be as a mother, I must also accept that my parenting will look different. I won't be able to "do it all," the prevailing attitude I've gleaned from culture and even some church communities. Mothers clean the house, cook the meals, drive the kids to activities, and facilitate every need while investing in their marriage and other relationships and obligations.

Although I may not need help with every task, my path to becoming a mother is fraught with many more obstacles and a greater need for support than sighted parents.

There is an emotional cost of motherhood, which, for me, lies in the grief that comes with not being able to witness the milestones every parent longs for — like seeing their baby smile for the first time. I wonder if my inability to experience these visual moments will disconnect me from my children or if they may be hesitant to share them with me in favor of a sighted family member or friend. Becoming a mother means choosing to lean into this grief and being willing to embrace it over and over as my children grow up.

As heavy as the grief and struggles feel now, I believe in my heart that children are worth it all. The Lord is sovereign over His creation — children and parents included. They are a blessing, as the psalmist reminds us: "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Psalm 127:3, ESV).



No matter the trials ahead, if the Lord blesses my marriage with children, that alone makes the trials worth enduring. The Lord gave me abilities and gifts — including my blindness — that I believe He'll use to "train up a child in the way he should go," as Proverbs 22:6 reminds us. Having a visually impaired mother will show my children that disability isn't something to be afraid or ashamed of and, when used to glorify God, can be a wonderful, fulfilling part of His plan for our lives. In finding adaptive methods for parenting, my children will witness resourcefulness and problem-solving in action, inspiring them to seek new and creative ways around problems they encounter.

Above all, I pray my children see in me a mother who loves them fiercely, prays for them continually, and leads them to trust in the Lord as their own. These are the responsibilities and privileges of a mother. I pray that if and when the time comes to bring down the little pink dress and little blue sweater from the shelf, I will look to the Lord — not only for strength and wisdom but for the grace to cherish every moment with the children He entrusts to me in His abundant lovingkindness.

*Rhianna McGregor Hajzer is a Christian by grace, blind by design, and a writer by passion. She writes from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.*

# Unexpected Motherhood:

## A Story of Loss, Love, and Finding God's Purpose

*Grief led Frances Clark to a new calling, raising her nieces, nephews, and countless other children with faith and unwavering love.*

by Tina Neeley

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“God, anoint me to be a mother. I don’t know what to do,” Frances Clark prayed desperately. Just months earlier, she was a single woman working with people with intellectual disabilities in her hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. She had plans for her future — her career, traveling, teaching, and, one day, marrying. What was missing from her plans now filled her home with children and four of them at that. Frances lost her sister to breast cancer and gained four daughters — 6-year-old twins and their two teenage sisters, becoming a mother overnight.

“I was traveling to minister. I used to go and preach and teach. So, that slowed up, and even though I was doing His work, that part of the work needed to be turned to teaching children and teenagers,” Frances explained. “I used to take them to the park and the movies but was able to drop them [off at] home. Well, their home became my home, and I was very angry. I told God, ‘This is not what I wanted; this is not my plan.’”

Reeling from loss and grief, the twins’ fears of abandonment glued them to their aunt. In the short time before their mother passed away, they’d lost their grandmother to breast cancer, and their 14-year-old cousin had died from a gunshot wound.

“Death was all around them,” Frances said.

So many people in their family died in such a short period that the twins were afraid to let those they cared for out of their sight. "It was a challenge to get them to know it's OK."

The teenagers processed grief differently, becoming rebellious and wanting to take charge of their own lives. "You're not my mama!" was the gauntlet thrown down in the days after their arrival.

Frances' hands were full, leaving little time or space for processing her own grief. Just like the children now in her charge, she had lost her mother, her sister, and her nephew.

She said, "All of my girls had to shift their mentality. This is not Aunt Franny anymore. This is now my mother and aunt. I had to shift, too. I'm not just the aunt. I've now become the mother, the provider, the shield, the protector, the covering, the hugger, and the encourager." It was a lot to process.

Chaos filled their lives, but Frances was not hopeless. After nearly a year of struggling and wrestling under the weight of it all, her attitude and her prayers shifted.

"God, what is Your purpose in this? I don't see a purpose in this." She shared, "I had to trust God because I was about to lose it."

After nearly a year in this new normal, Frances opened her hands, her plans and



dreams falling to the floor and rising back to heaven on wings of surrender and new prayers. “I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose — I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace]” (Philippians 4:13, AMP).

“God, anoint me to be a mother. I don’t know what to do. This is an unexpected thing for me. This is not my plan, but this is Your plan. Tell me which strategies, which way to go, and who the people I need around me to support and help me are.”

Frances sought help for her and the children, now her children. She called on her friends with young children for advice on navigating the twins’ tantrums and on friends with teenagers to learn how they managed the emotional rollercoaster of those caught between the ages of a child and a young adult. Professional therapy — along with her prayers and encouragement, moved the girls forward step by step.

At the time, Frances had no idea what was yet to come. Four years later, breast cancer came for another of her sisters, and three more children came into her home, ages 10, 12, and 15. She opened her heart and home to them

and became the mother of seven.

Although Frances became a mother twice overnight, transitioning from Aunt Franny to Mama was a faith journey. Frances knew she could take her struggles to the Lord in prayer and expect Him to answer.

“When you’re grounded in God, and you sit back, wait, and listen to the voice of God, you can’t go wrong. The Bible says the Holy Spirit comes to lead and guide us into all truth. I depend on the Holy Spirit,” Frances declared.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13, NIV).

She understood that the children in her care were like sponges, listening to everything she said. She knew they would take in whatever she projected and receive the things she spoke over them.

“You have to watch what you say, project good, healthy things, [to enable] them to be a good, productive child and adult,” said Frances.

Today, Frances’ children are grown and reflect the things projected to them under her parenting and the answers to her prayers. Of the girls, one is a daycare owner, one is a certified nursing assistant med tech, one is

pursuing her doctorate in sociology with plans of becoming a social therapist, and another has a transportation business. The grown boys work in construction.

Frances notes the ongoing value of talk therapy, noting that the girls now make sure it's available to their own children. When bundled with prayer, it's a powerful tool.

"I'm not teaching them to depend on it, but I'm teaching them it's OK to talk it out," said Frances confidently. "It helps them to go to therapy, pray to God, and live life because we can't stop the hits, the bangs, and the punches from coming, but you can be prepared before it hits you. You can know when to get up, that you can get up and take a breather, and start all over again."

Frances and her family later moved to Lynchburg, Virginia. Their home was soon full of other children, too. "Aunt Franny" opened her heart to countless other children who stayed with her when they struggled with their sense of direction.

"My house was filled with kids whose parents couldn't deal with them or their mom was on drugs. Even the parents call me Aunt Franny. Having that many kids in the house, you learn how to be a nurturer. I'm nurturing children that I did not birth."

After surrendering to the call of motherhood, Frances embraced God's plans, understanding better why her original plans were, in all honesty, less than fulfilling.

"I'm now doing what God called me to do, His will, and I'm satisfied because one of the things I tell people is if you're not doing God's will and His purpose, you're never going to be satisfied. Everything you do for yourself and not God is going to cause you to have an emptiness because it's not His purpose.

Frances continued, "After a year with these kids, I realized that I was running and going and doing everything else, trying to fill that void and emptiness. They came in to help me develop the purpose that God has given me, not only for me but for them. I teach these kids that for every problem you're facing, you need to pray to God first because what you pray about is in the hands of God. Only He can do what you can't do. Your purpose, your ambitions, your career, you being a mama — even an unexpected mama — put that in the hands of God and watch Him create something that goes beyond what you build in your mind for yourself. He sees everything and does not miss one detail of our life." And for everything she taught them, they — and God — taught her more.

She said, "He took my motherless spirit and



taught me to be a mother to my nieces and nephews. He anointed me to do that, and I am so grateful. I don't know where my life would be if He didn't. I would still be empty.

"I don't know why He chose me, but He knew what I could give them and what they gave me. These kids raised me and taught me not only to be a mother but to have patience and understanding, to change my ways and not be selfish, and to be more of a giver."

Frances' story is about unexpected motherhood and the profound transformation that occurs when faith meets fortitude. From a life carefully planned to one divinely ordained, she discovered a strength she never knew she possessed, leaving an enduring legacy of love.

*Tina Neeley is an inspirational feature story writer from Shelbyville, Tennessee, who looks for the extraordinary in ordinary things, believing her myopic degeneration is a gift that inspires these closer looks.*

### **Puzzle Answers:**

**Across:** 1. Compassion; 5. Daughter; 10. Longed; 11. Commandment; 13. Whatever; 15. Enabled; 17. Nursing; 18. Contend; 19. Lemuel; 20. Disciple

**Down:** 1. Chosen; 2. Nations; 3. Forgets; 4. Jerusalem; 6. Granted; 7. Joyful; 8. Sincere; 9. Practice; 12. Treasured; 14. Gently; 16. Deeply

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