

an inspiration booklet

**WILD
HOPE**
FOR TODAY



THE MOMCO

WILD HOPE FOR MOMS

Jeremiah 29:11, NIV: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

Motherhood for me has been a whirlwind journey! Alongside the sleepless nights, the self-doubt, and the countless situations that were never mentioned in any child-rearing book, came a rollercoaster of emotions that I was ill-equipped to navigate: joy, frustration, laughter and tears—often simultaneously. It's not surprising that many of my own friends feel overwhelmed, lonely and even hopeless alongside me in navigating motherhood. Yet, during the chaos, there is a wild hope that sustains us, a hope found in Christ that can anchor our souls.

Wild hope isn't the kind that relies on our circumstances. That kind of hope is only surface-deep and will surely disappear when times get tough. Instead, wild hope is a radical trust in God's promises. It is a deep conviction that He is in control, and He is with us, even when life feels out of our control. When we face challenges in motherhood—whether it's dealing with a tantrum-prone toddler, navigating the teenage years, or letting go as our children spread their wings and leave the nest—wild hope reminds us that God is with us every step of the way. He sees our

struggles, He hears our prayers, and He promises to never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Wild hope is also about trust. As moms, it is easy to worry about the future. We are rightfully concerned about our children's well-being, education and relationships, not to mention our own lives and dreams. But God reminds us in Jeremiah 29:11 that He has plans for us and for our children—plans to prosper us, not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future. Wild hope reminds us to surrender our fears and anxieties to God. It is natural to care deeply about our children's future, but God's love for them far surpasses anything we can imagine. He is their ultimate protector, provider and guide. As we entrust our children to His care, we can rest in the assurance that they are in the safest hands possible.

So, dear mom, as you navigate the untamed adventure of motherhood, cling to wild hope. Trust in God's promises to journey alongside you through this thing called motherhood, and surrender your fears and anxieties to Him daily. Remember that you are not alone on this journey. God is with you every step of the way, filling your heart with hope and guiding you toward a future filled with His blessings.

QUESTIONS:

- *What is one worry you've been clinging to that you can place at the feet of Jesus today?*

BE OPEN TO RECEIVE

In August 2009, following meticulous planning for what I thought would be my fourth and final pregnancy, I was surprised to learn that I was expecting triplets. This revelation meant I would be doubling the number of children that called me mom, as I already had three little ones aged 5, 3 and 13 months.

Throughout my pregnancy, people would ask how they could help, and I would habitually brush off offers with a polite, "I'm fine."

Then, one day, a package of diapers appeared on my doorstep without a note. It was a small gesture, but it touched me. Soon, it became a pattern – a car seat, clothes, more diapers, and an array of baby essentials, all left anonymously at my door. When I questioned my MomCo sisters about it, they simply smiled and denied any knowledge.

Eventually, news arrived that painters were scheduled to beautify my nursery. Overwhelmed by this unexpected generosity, I felt compelled to express my gratitude. However, a friend's wise words reminded me that these acts were borne out of pure kindness, with no desire for recognition. It dawned on me that while I kept declining help, I actually needed it.

My MomCo sisters, realizing this, joined forces and began discreetly leaving items at my doorstep, relieving me of the burden of asking for aid. Reflecting on this, I questioned my discomfort with accepting help. Why did I feel the need to maintain control over an unforeseen situation? Not only did I need help, but people wanted to help.

Matthew 7:7-8 NIV: *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

God ensures you never face challenges alone by placing who or what you need in your path. This is precisely how God was working for me when he led my MomCo sisters to leave baby items on my doorstep.

Being open to receive is not a sign of weakness; instead, it presents an opportunity for divine intervention in your life. God understands your needs, and by opening yourself to receive, you allow his blessings to flow. Trust that God is ever-present, prepared to lead you through every facet of your life. You need not bear any burden alone!

QUESTIONS:

- *Where can you create space in your life to welcome support from others? Is it in accepting assistance, or perhaps it involves pursuing a long-awaited life change?*
- *Have you experienced a period when you were closed off to receiving? How did this impact your overall well-being?*

ENDURING PRESENCE

It often takes going through a hardship to see the hands and feet of God at work in our lives. It shouldn't be that way, but we can get so distracted by what's going on around us that we don't see it as much in the everyday.

My husband is a government worker and when the government shut down a few years ago for over a month, he was required to work with no pay. He did receive back-pay once it reopened, but we were on our own until then. We had enough saved to cover basic expenses, but nothing extra.

Of course, all three of our boys outgrew their shoes that month. Enter Marcia.

Marcia and I met through MomCo at our local church. You know those women that you just click with? That you don't have to explain yourself to as much, they just get you? That was my friendship with Marcia. And bonus! Our boys were thick as thieves too. She was a dream friend—supportive, encouraging, challenging when I needed it, and always pointing me to Jesus.

We hadn't known each other long when she announced that they would be moving out of state. I knew that technology allowed us to stay in touch, but given that we both had young kids who were home full time, I knew it would make staying connected difficult.

Fast forward to the shutdown. I got an email from Marcia, who now lived on the opposite side of the country. The email contained a Target gift card, with exactly the amount that I needed to outfit my boys with new shoes. I hadn't even told her about the shoes!

Following the email, she texted me asking what kind of pizza we liked. An hour later, she texted to say that pizza was going to be delivered at dinner time.

Matthew 28:19-20: *We are commissioned to spread His teachings and expand His Kingdom. As His hands and feet, we are to go out into the world, share His message, and bring others into the fold of His love, all the while being reassured of His enduring presence (emphasis added).*

That is what Marcia did for my family that day: She was the hands and feet of Jesus because I needed reassurance of his enduring presence. It wasn't about the money she spent, it was the fact that she took the time to recognize a need (when I hadn't even expressed it) and followed the Holy Spirit's leading.

Had I not found community in MomCo, I wouldn't have experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in the same way. And I wouldn't have found a gem like Marcia.

QUESTIONS:

- Think of a time when someone has been the hands and feet of Jesus to you. How did that make you feel?
- Now think of a way that you can show up for someone in your community. A neighbor, friend, your pastor's wife, a coworker. Pray about who may need encouragement and support right now and then do it!

THE MESSY WAY OF HOSPITALITY

My parents were (and still are!) hospitality experts. Our spacious farmhouse welcomed any friend to come over, open the fridge, and help themselves to what was inside. There were always frozen pizzas in the basement, ready to feed a hungry host of teenagers. My parents joyfully hosted missionaries, college singing groups, family gatherings, youth group parties, baby showers, and prayer groups throughout my growing up years. And I've always wanted the same kind of home—one that felt welcoming and ready to throw open its doors.

Except, I wasn't always ready to open my doors. Because I have these three things called small children. The children constantly create messes, and every preparation takes three times as long with them underfoot. And they never seem to nap the afternoon before we have people over. Never.

So, what's a mom to do? Close up the doors until they're teens and able to help clean the bathroom? Instead, I've decided to embrace the messy way of hospitality. At its core, hospitality isn't buttoned up. It's not putting your best foot forward or making sure it looks like people don't live at your house. Hospitality treats outsiders like insiders and strangers like family, cobwebs and all.

Hebrews 13:1-2 : *Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*

The writer of Hebrews wants to remind us that our hospitality can have a spiritual impact we never even know about. Welcoming a new-to-the-group mom over to your mess tells her that HER mess is okay too. Asking a neighbor for coffee and listening to her story and life wisdom tells her she matters. Inviting a family you don't know well over for grilled hamburgers or take-out pizza reminds them they are seen and loved, not just by you, but by our welcoming Jesus.

Treating people who aren't like family as if they are our nearest and dearest is exactly what God does to us time and time again. It is the heart of true hospitality.

Messy hospitality serves dinner on paper plates, doesn't clean up the playroom (the kids are going to create chaos anyway), and isn't trying to be something or someone they're not—but is simply serving, listening and loving. When we open ourselves to this kind of hospitality, we create eternal ripple effects spreading the love and welcoming spirit of Jesus over our children, family, community, church and world.

QUESTIONS:

- *What holds you back from practicing hospitality regularly?*
- *What's one small way this week you can practice messy hospitality?*

HOPE IN FRIENDSHIP LOSS

It is said that "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1 KJV)," and in my experience, this is true with friendship.

A few years ago, I experienced a heartbreaking 20-year friendship loss. While I can now see more clearly what God was doing, it was one of my most painful experiences. Because good friends hold your hair when you are sick, wipe your tears when you are sad, and pour the coffee when you feel lost, their absence can feel lonely.

I struggled to see past the loss of this friend, but God had already paved a path of redemption I was never expecting.

On a whim, I joined an online writing group. It was an investment, and I wanted to put my all or nothing into this group.

We met every other week for 12 weeks and talked about writing, social media and accountability. When the 12 weeks were over, there stood the fork.

Do we stop here, or continue this journey that feels new, fresh and life-giving? We had connected in such a unique way that it didn't feel right to just stop. Collaboratively, we decided to continue building whatever it was God had placed before us.

Over the next year, the five of us met consistently. Our discussions about writing slowly turned into talk about family, prayers for our kids, and sharing about life's hardships. With each passing day, the five of us continued to become closer. After a year, we planned a meetup and spent three days together sharing our deepest aches and the messiest parts of our stories. Each of us sat, listened and engaged. We were invested.

And it was then, for the first time, that I understood. I had lost one friend, but I gained four.

It has been three years, and the five of us continue to meet via Zoom, chat daily, text, and send funny reels to each other. We have met in person in Indiana, Tennessee and Florida, sharing stories, tears and laughs that go into the depths of our bellies.

And we have experienced the restoration promise of Jesus.

The five of us live across the country from each other. But it doesn't stop the sisterhood that was so clearly set before us.

Adult friendships are hard. But God. He knows and is so, so good. He is not just a one-fold God, he is a four-fold promise keeper.

QUESTIONS:

- *How are you trusting that He can restore what has been lost?*
- *What have you lost that God has restored in multiplication?*
- *In my story, I had to take a leap of faith and join the writing group in the midst of being afraid of new relationships. Is there something the Lord may be asking you to do that requires some faith?*

MICHELE WILBERT

BENT BENEATH A LOAD

Hunched over my planner, putting in dentist appointments, soccer practices, and upcoming school events, my mind remembered a whole list of other things that needed to be added to my to-do list. While on hold with insurance to ask a billing question, I started a load of laundry and scrubbed a grass stain out of a uniform.

My mind again wandered back to my to-do list as a voice echoed from my kitchen, "Hello, this is Mary. Can you give me your account number?"

"Oh, that's right - I was on hold - wait, who had I called?" I said to myself.

Our lists as moms are big and often, our stresses bigger. Without realizing it, I had held the stress of the day in my slouched shoulders until I finally had a chance to relax at bedtime and wondered why my back and shoulders felt so tight. Then we add in our jobs, disciplining kids, and helping with homework, and this is just a normal day. Add to this illness, grief, and worry, and we are often carrying a heavy mental load.

How can we release the things we carry so tightly that burden us with such a heavy weight?

We're reminded,

Psalm 145:14: *The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.*

God gives us the promise of His presence and a helper, the Spirit, who walks with us. We don't have to pick up things and place the burden of them on ourselves. When we release our worries, the things that preoccupy our mind, and even our to-do lists, God meets us and carries us.

Jesus teaches,

Matthew 11:28-30: *Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

He invites us to come to Him and He will provide rest for our souls. As a mom, this brings me comfort knowing that I am not asked to carry all of motherhood. I can stop the trail of "what if" thinking, trying to control outcomes, and the everyday weight of being a mom. There is One who will carry it for me. When I am feeling bent beneath the Lord, my God will provide rest for my soul.

QUESTIONS:

- *In what ways are you feeling bent beneath your load?*
- *What things can you surrender to the Lord today to carry?*

LIGHT FOR THE DARKNESS

Isaiah 42:16: *And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.*

When Jesus came to earth as a baby, the world seemed very dark and heavy for the nation of Israel. They had experienced 400 years of silence from God. Four hundred years. Generations came and went. No prophets spoke. There were no more mountaintop, holy moments with God as in former days. Only silence.

In the meantime, the Roman empire rose to rule the world. Rome oppressed its citizens with edicts from the emperor, heavy taxes, and a forceful military presence. The people of Israel longed for a Savior during these dark days and wondered if God had forgotten them.

Have you ever felt that way? You pray and nothing changes. Your circumstances look so bleak that you can't imagine how God could break through the darkness. The road ahead seems so rocky that you wonder how the path could ever possibly smooth.

During such a season in my life, I found today's verse in Isaiah, and it changed me. It didn't change my circumstances, but it changed my perspective about them and about God.

The book of Isaiah, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, tells us so much about him and about God's love for his people. We read about God's character and heart, and how he promises to always care for his people, even when he guides us to and through hard things.

Isaiah 42:16 tells us that although we may face the unfamiliar, the dark and the rocky, God never leaves us. His guidance, presence and light will always be with us. He promises that we will experience him in the challenging paths of life.

In Isaiah 7:14, God says Jesus will be called Immanuel, God with us. God sent Jesus to be near to us, to be with us through every season and circumstance.

God intentionally chose the exact circumstances and timing for Jesus to be born into. He knew the world was chaotic. He knew his people were desperate for relief. He knew the time was right to send his light for the people.

If you find yourself in a sweet season today, remember how God has been with you in a challenging season. If you are in a season of heaviness, never give up hope. When the world seems darkest, God's light shines brightest. He is leading you and walking with you. He is always working behind the scenes and his timing is always perfect.

QUESTIONS:

- *How do the timing and circumstances of Jesus' birth give you hope?*
- *How have you experienced God's light and love in a difficult season?*

IT'S NOT THE RACE THAT KILLS YOU

I had a moment of insanity and decided to run a marathon. Ask any marathoner, and they'll tell you it's not the race that kills you; it's the training. It's hours upon hours of simply putting on your sneakers and grinding out the miles needed to build the endurance to finish the race.

On race morning, I was as ready as I could be. After the crack of the starting pistol, I settled into a steady pace, and the miles went by in a blur. But at the mid-point, I started to feel it in my legs. I got slower. I began to pass limping runners, and my knee began to ache. By Mile 21, I was exhausted. After over four hours of running, I fantasized about faking an injury so I could stop. I just wanted the race to be over and the pain to end. I had hit the wall.

Being a mom is like running a marathon; only as soon as you cross one finish line, another race begins. More often than not, it's not the significant life events that wear us out; it's the endless daily grind. It's the laundry and the making of dinner. The million parenting decisions that are minor on their own, but compiled are overwhelming. Every mom hits the point of exhaustion at some point. You pray for the stress to end. You hit the wall.

Back at Mile 21, just as I was about to give up, I heard a familiar voice. Up ahead, jumping up and down, were two friends waving their arms and cheering like they were witnessing Olympic history. Their

loud confidence in my ability to finish the race was contagious, and I felt my energy level surge back up.

"I'm doing it! I'm going to make it to the finish!"

"Yes!" they screamed. "You are doing it!!!"

I jogged off and finished the race, each painful step fueled by the love and encouragement of my friends.

Sometimes, we lack the endurance to keep going. In whatever marathon you may be in, whether that be mothering, marriage, work, financial or spiritual marathons, you don't have to run alone. God offers us another option, one that does not depend on our own inner fortitude as the sole source of our strength.

Hebrews 11:1, NIV: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.*

Faith is believing that you will break through that wall with God's help. It's a willingness to surrender your attempts to do it all by yourself and instead, rely on his promise that He will give us the endurance we need. Sometimes, that will come in the form of supernatural peace, a miracle or a Bible verse. Sometimes, it will be his divine love, taking the shape of a dear friend, cheering you on from the sidewalk as you take a deep breath and keep running.

QUESTIONS:

- *What kind of marathon do you feel like you're running right now? How's your energy level?*
- *Are you trying to run this race alone, or have you asked God to help you? If alone, take a minute now to surrender and ask for his help and endurance. If you have, take a minute to reflect on the many ways He is encouraging you in your race, for example, through scripture, family or your friends.*

BACKYARD CAMPING

Shadows danced on the side of the tent as the lantern gently swayed back and forth from the tent top.

“One more chapter.... Pleasseeeee!” my kids begged as I tried closing the *Hank the Cow Dog* book for the second time.

Tucker, our giant St. Bernard, laid next to the sleeping bags snoring. Hank had nothing on his luxurious camping life.

“Hold on,” I said as I stood up, unzipped the tent, and walked to get a flashlight ... from the garage. We weren’t in the woods; we were in our backyard.

I had a baby who needed to be nursed and was awake all night with reflux, and three other children who wanted to put on Daniel Boone hats at a campsite and fight wild animals in the woods. So, backyard camping seemed the perfect compromise.

Sure, it wasn’t quite the rugged, authentic experience of a wild outdoor adventure, but it was still good, and I was amazed at how quickly we all started acting like we were camping.

I put down dishes and laundry, we snuggled under candlelight with no technology, and we slept in the great outdoors.

This became a summer tradition - backyard camping. And it’s now a core memory for my children of their childhood.

I once read in an article that families who camp together have stronger bonds, and children who camp have more confidence, self-reliance in the outdoors, and a greater sense of adaptability.

My guess is this applies to other outdoor activities as well. I see it as my kids race down a ski slope, jump into a lake, and dig their hands deep into garden soil. There is something that comes alive in them, and in me, that is different from indoor activities.

I think God designed it this way. In Genesis, 1 God speaks all life into existence - light, air, water, earth, plants and animals. Every time God made something, he said it was “very good.” He wove into creation the very reflection and display of his goodness, character, power and nature. So, when we are in the outdoors, enjoying all that God created, we experience the Creator Himself.

Life can feel hard and heavy sometimes. But when we step outside and move our bodies, smell the fresh air, and witness the beauty of God’s world, our mood shifts and our spirits are revived—no matter what age.

Let’s open the door, pitch the tent in the backyard, and call that a win.

Psalm 19:1: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

QUESTIONS:

- *What is your favorite way to get outside and play?*
- *How could you think creatively about building memories and experiences outside to make it work for this season of your life?*

GIFTS FROM AN UNINVITED GUEST

Grief. A five-letter word that we don't like to associate with motherhood. But grief affects mamas more than we may realize.

Maybe it is the dying of dreams for yourself - giving up the career, the pre-pregnancy body, or the first time your child rejects you. Perhaps you are in the throes of postpartum depression. Or maybe you lost your mother before she could meet your precious children. Or maybe you are grieving a new diagnosis for your child and struggling to accept a new life for your family.

In the beginning, she will not leave you alone. Grief stays well past her welcome. Even when you do not have the energy to entertain her, she stays. She knows when you are depleted, and yet she moves in anyways. And so, you learn to live with her. She reminds us that life is not what it is supposed to be. Grief introduces us to a community of others who have also met her. She teaches us to repent of our self-reliance and choose trust. Grief can sometimes teach us more than an answered prayer would.

Grief tells us that two thousand years ago, a man named Jesus knew her well. Jesus carried her on his back to the cross. Jesus told Grief she had a limited number of visits until He would rescue his people forever. His blood flowing down was the promise that there was a limited number of tears that would flow for you and me.

Grief can change what we value, what we treasure, and what we give.

So, when we see Grief at our doorstep, perhaps it is not an invasion, but an invitation. She is here to remind us that the world is broken, but this is not God's original design. And she is a messenger to remind us that whatever insurmountable motherhood battles we are facing - we have not been abandoned. For God is near to the broken-hearted and comforts those who mourn. Perhaps Grief reminds us that the truest need for our children isn't a well-rounded childhood - their truest need is a Savior from this temporal and evil world. She is reminding us that our citizenship belongs to a country where tears will no longer be.

Perhaps Grief may not be such a dreaded guest after all. She leads us to the cross and away from ourselves. She brings us to a Savior who understands our grief Himself. And in this grief, He brings us healing and peace.

Isaiah 53:3-6 : *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

QUESTIONS:

- *Where are you grieving in your motherhood? And how does Jesus understand and redeem this grief for you?*
- *Can you see grief as a vehicle to healing and peace? Why or why not?*
- *Spend some time with Jesus, reflecting on how He was "a man stricken with sorrows and well acquainted with grief."*

MAKING SPACE FOR CONNECTION

"I need a phone charger right now," our fifteen-year-old foster daughter said.

The social worker had just dropped Annie off for the night. As the minutes passed, she grew visibly anxious. "I need to call my boyfriend."

"Well, we don't have a charger for your specific phone, but you're welcome to use our phone," I said.

She dialed him. No answer. Annie rubbed her temples, scratched her arms, and closed her eyes.

"Hey, it's going to be okay," I said. "You guys can connect tomorrow. It's late, anyway. How about a peanut butter sandwich?"

She reluctantly agreed. Over the next few hours, Annie hung out with my husband and me. We talked about life, food and Tik-Tok trends. We even made her laugh at one point. Score!

The next morning, Annie and I went for a walk. I shared my faith with her, hoping a seed landed someplace in her heart.

By early afternoon, her social worker picked her up. I thought to myself, "Whoa. What a whirlwind. Bet I'll never talk to Annie again. I hope she is okay."

A few days later, Annie sent me a message online.

"Hi, I just wanted to say thank you for having me. I enjoyed spending time with your family. I even surprised myself, usually I just sit in my room on my phone, but for whatever weird reason, when I was at your house, I wanted to be around your family."

I couldn't believe it. I also had to chuckle because "whatever weird reason" wasn't parenting genius—it was simply a dead phone battery, and two adults who cared. Had Annie's phone been charged, she would've preferred to use it. But she was starving for the kind of patient and loving human interaction that Christ followers offer. Unplugging from her phone and connecting with real-life humans filled her cup and alleviated her stress in a way that she wasn't accustomed to.

Kids today are drowning in a mental health crisis, and overuse of devices are a major cause. We moms are called to fight for the hearts of our kids.

1 Thessalonians 5:14: *We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

God uses his people (that's you!) to do his work. Making space to unpack the burdens of our kids' hearts is our duty and joy as moms.

QUESTIONS:

- Will you look for a place today to connect with your kids?
- Will you create a device-free zone, even for a small pocket of time—during the car ride, over the dinner table, before bedtime—to encourage, help and point them to Jesus, the ultimate Giver of rest?

GOD DEFINES YOU

My upbringing is complicated. I have fond memories from my childhood, but I also have some hard, abusive memories as well. The thing is, the messages we hear as children are the messages we carry with us into adulthood. Those messages, whether spoken with words or actions are ingrained into our souls.

I'm not good enough.

No one wants to spend time with me.

I am so dumb.

But those are lies -lies that grow inside our heads and our hearts. And the only way to break those messages is to shine a light on them. How do we do that?

Share what you are thinking. Thoughts like these grow when we keep them secret. Soon, I'm not good enough becomes I am worthless. No one wants to spend time with me becomes no one would miss me if I was gone. It is a quiet growth that we might not notice until it explodes. We must share how we feel!

Our whole mom community is built upon the fact that we are not alone. We understand sleepless nights, whiny kids, never-ending laundry, etc. We bond over these things. Here is a truth I know: Every mom has thought she was not enough. In some way, at some time, every mom has felt like this.

I also know that when someone shares something hard or vulnerable, I am proud of them! I heard someone say, when someone is vulnerable, we admire them; but we don't want to be vulnerable because we are afraid of being judged.

Replace the lie with truth. There was one winter where it snowed a lot, and it didn't get warm enough to melt the snow. Our

neighborhood road didn't get plowed and the vehicles driving down it formed these deep ruts. You could literally drive down the road hands free because your tires just followed the ruts. But when you got to your home, you had to work extra hard to get your vehicle out of the ruts to turn into your driveway. You have believed those lies above for so long that getting your heart to hear the truth will be hard and may take time. Just like you have to speak out loud what you are thinking, you must speak the truth loudly. Let your ears hear it. Repeat it over and over.

What is the truth? The truth is who God says you are. The truth is who God says He is. Read it. Out loud. Let it sink in. Write it down. Begin to believe it.

Deuteronomy 31:8: *I will not leave you.*

Psalms 138:8: *My steadfast love endures forever.*

Psalms 46:1: *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

Revelation 21:5: *And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.*

John 14:6: *Jesus said to him, 'I am the way the truth and the life.'*

Jeremiah 32:27: *Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?*

Ephesians 2:10: *For we are God's masterpiece.*

Isaiah 43:1: *Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.*

1 Peter 2:9: *You are a chosen people...God's very own possession*

Your past, upbringing, mistakes, failures and hurts do not define you. God defines you, and he call you his own. He loves you. He longs to spend time with you. He makes you worthy.

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A FULL LIFE

On April 1, 2019, I received the heartbreaking diagnosis of incurable cancer. This news left me completely shocked and filled with fear, especially for my six children, ages 14, 13, 10, and three 9-year-olds. However, amidst the despair, this diagnosis ignited a newfound determination within me to live passionately. It became my opportunity to seize life with passion and purpose.

When confronted with this heartbreaking news, I made a conscious decision to leave the gift of living passionately to my children. Instead of constantly cautioning them to be careful, I began encouraging them to embrace life with joy and excitement. "Have fun!" became my mantra for them. I urged them to seize every opportunity for enjoyment and adventure, reminding them that life is meant to be lived to the fullest.

For a brief moment, I questioned if my encouragement had backfired when my oldest son, Matthew, requested that I go skydiving with him on his 18th birthday. Despite every part of my brain screaming NO, I could only respond with a resounding "YES!"

Two days after his milestone birthday, we jumped out of a perfectly good airplane—together. It's a moment my son

and I will always cherish.

John 10:10 NIV: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*

Embrace a life of passion! Recognize that God has bestowed upon you this invaluable gift of life, urging you to live with enthusiasm. Let every action you take be a testament to him. Living passionately goes beyond simply enjoying your hobbies. It means finding fulfillment in all your duties, facing trials with resilience, and showing appreciation for the people around you, knowing they are placed in your life by God with purpose.

Embracing life with passion is essential to living a full life and God is calling you to do just that. Step out and enjoy experiences. To live passionately involves seizing every moment, big or small, chasing lifelong dreams, and finding joy in the journey toward their attainment.

If I could impart one message to everyone, it would be to seize life to its fullest! Embrace the chaos, pursue your dreams, and embrace the thrilling adventures that await you! Don't wait for the diagnosis, or the perfect moment; do it now and have fun!

QUESTIONS:

- *Are you embracing life with passion? Where can you choose to surrender and wholeheartedly trust in God's guidance?*
- *What are three things that ignite your passion? How can you integrate these elements into your daily life?*
- *Is there something you've yearned to do, even if it frightens you?*

TRUE HOPE

"Actually, I'm never going to die, Mommy," my four-year-old informed me when I tried to gracefully approach the good news of Easter for the first time this weekend.

I was expecting her to react in gratitude or joy when I told her that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, so that we can live forever with him in a world made right when we die.

I balked and changed the subject, unsure of how to answer well. Thinking more on it later, I pulled deep within myself:

- What is the hope here that I want her to grasp?
- How do I break the news that we will all die one day?
- Or that we might actually die tomorrow, or never wake up in the morning?
- That a good, long, easy life isn't promised no matter how cute or good or faithful you are?

It felt wrong to pop her bubble, so I didn't that morning. But I worry that doing so may have inadvertently given her a false hope, a cheesy dupe of the real thing.

Because our inevitable struggle and suffering and death does not nullify the goodness of God. These hard parts don't make the glory less glorious. And she will need the true hope of the gospel to anchor her when the inevitable trials appear at her door and in her home and in her heart.

And I realized that my response to God looks a lot like her response to me. When I cling too hard to the look and feeling of my current circumstances, unwilling to place them in the light of eternity, I have the tendency of feeling a little cheated too.

I have been known to ignore the harder parts of life and beg for more goodness. I am a frequent

prayer for provision and peace and good feelings. I often don't want to pop my own bubble, even if that means ignoring the true truth and hope of life.

How can I pass hope along to my daughter when I don't actively cling to it myself?

It was a faith reckoning that I wasn't expecting from the mouth of my toddler that led me toward Jesus, once again having to exchange my false idols and hope for the real stuff.

Because if I don't have the truth in my heart and my perspective, then I'll be sorely disappointed when things don't go my way, and I'll be devastated when said struggles are meaningless. And I don't want to pass that perspective along through generations, like a hereditary disease that rots the soul.

1 Peter 1:3-6: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*

I'm determined to instill true hope in my kids by living it out and believing in it myself. By talking about the glory that can come from suffering, the great news of heaven, and the redemption of all pain.

Because anything else is cheating them of the wild hope that Jesus gives, one that isn't dependent on circumstances and death.

QUESTIONS:

- How do you handle hard conversations with your kids?
- What hope do you base your life on?
- What is a way you can authentically communicate hope through every circumstance to your kids?

GRACE FOR THE MOM-BODY

A mom's relationship with her body is a lot like the one with her kid: just when she thinks she's settled into a healthy rhythm and got it all figured out, developmental needs change and daily routines demand recalibration.

We understand our children aren't designed to stay the same forever, but it sure is hard to extend that thinking to ourselves as moms moving through different stages of life.

I'm reminded of that principle every time I look in the mirror. I start to focus on the lines of my forehead and the bags under my eyes. It's hard to ignore the large lump protruding from my right thigh and the tummy pooch overlapping my waistline after two C-sections.

Social media relentlessly reinforces this temptation to compare my body with others. Before-and-after photos can trigger both envy and judgment—and even friends' "glamour" posts can lead to condemnation over my failure to meet the latest beauty ideal.

Then, I stop and consider - those constant posts of women documenting beauty wishes and waistline dreams may reflect their desire for validation—a need to know they are beautiful in another's eyes. And in that way, am I not grasping for the same thing when I scan my body for all its imperfections in hopes they can be

overlooked in true admiration?

God knows how we are made—from the inside out. He loves us to our innermost being, even before our bodies are fully formed in the womb (see Psalm 139:13-16). Beyond that—in melodic verse any woman would want to hear—the King declares that he is enthralled by our beauty (see Psalm 45:11).

I engage in my fair share of health and esthetic routines to feel strong and attractive, but I'm becoming more comfortable with my physical flaws as I focus on God's words more—and scroll less. Those facial lines now represent the blessing of time to see my children grow up. That lump on my outer thigh reminds me of when God protected my life after a terrible fall off a runaway horse. And my abdominal scars help me remember his faithfulness in bringing new life out of multiple miscarriages. The world may see these as blemishes that mar the picture of perfection; God has taught me they are marks of a masterpiece in motion.

While it's bittersweet to watch our children's bodies grow and change, we never hold it against them because we know that's how God created them in all his wonderful ways. As we continue to grow in the love and knowledge of our Creator, may we each learn to give our mom-bodies the same measure of grace.

QUESTIONS:

- *What's one way you can honor your changing body today?*

SUZANNE FELTON

GO AWAY TOGETHER

When I first became a mom, I was overcome with a joyful sense of responsibility. God had entrusted me with a precious little life who needed me for everything, and I did not take that lightly. I threw myself wholeheartedly into the job. It was challenging, exhausting and wonderful.

I was so wrapped up in motherhood, the last thing I expected was for my husband to come to me a few months in and say, "Let's go away for the weekend. Just us."

What? I couldn't do that. What about the baby? He needed me. I couldn't leave him. I might miss something—his first word, a tooth breaking through, one of his heart-melting smiles. His grandparents were great, but they didn't know our routine. They didn't know where I kept everything. They didn't know my son like I did. Go away for the weekend? Ridiculous.

Not to be deterred, my husband kept insisting we take a little vacation to celebrate our upcoming anniversary. What was he thinking? He was a new parent too. We both needed to be with our baby. Was he trying to avoid changing diapers for a couple of days? Was he crazy?

I was the crazy one.

One of God's greatest blessings in my life is my husband's commitment to our

relationship, not just to our marriage, but also to our friendship. He reminded me that our journey together began years before our child was born, and it needs to last longer than he'll live under our roof. It needs to stay healthy and strong while we raise our family, so we should take time to nurture it.

How could I argue with that?

We took our anniversary getaway. It was nothing exotic, just sightseeing downtown, but our time together was priceless. I cried over leaving our son at first, but before long, I realized how much I'd missed spending time alone with my life partner and best friend.

Every year since then we've made it a point to go somewhere, just the two of us, right around our anniversary. A national park, a college basketball game, or even local date night will do. The main thing is to remind ourselves that our marriage needs our care and attention as much as our children do. It's not always easy to find time in our busy family schedule, but we make time for each other because it's that important.

We celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary last month and had just as much fun together as we did on that first getaway.

QUESTIONS:

- *Do you ever get so wrapped up in parenting that you forget to give your marriage the attention it needs?*
- *What are some things you and your husband enjoy doing together? When is the last time you did one of them? this season of your life?*

STEADY CONFIDENCE

2 Corinthians 9:8: *And God who is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite things to do was play dress-up. Dress up items are one of the favorite things for girls around the world who receive a shoebox gift! Honestly, I still love to dress up, but as a kid, a costume gave me such a confidence boost! And isn't that so true? We want to look and feel beautiful to those around us. And who doesn't love a good tiara?!?

But this "beauty hack" is rarely ever enough now that I am a grown up. In a world full of voices saying exactly who and what we should be, it can be easy to fall into fear, thinking we have to be everything for everyone. We have our different hats we put on and take off to suit the occasion. No matter the self-confidence they bring in the moment, we somehow still find ourselves battling feelings of insufficiency—in our work, motherhood, organizational skills or special areas of talent. You name it - it can be attacked.

Motherhood requires confidence from something much more stable than the clunky plastic heels we used to wear as children, a confidence not reliant on outward adornment, but instead a truth dwelling inside us.

2 Corinthians 9:8 speaks of a sufficiency in all things at all times in every good work. I don't know about you, but that is not me. No amount of jewelry, real or otherwise, is

going to help me be patient with a child that is melting down over scratchy socks! Wearing the best brands can't cover the overwhelm of a chronically ill child, the mountains of laundry after a vacation, or the feeling of discord with a spouse. So, where does true sufficiency originate? God's grace. He bestows grace in abundance that covers my imperfections and weaknesses.

But aren't our shortcomings exactly what make us unqualified? No!

In fact, it is our shortcomings that qualify us to receive His grace. And He has promised to equip you for the good work He has planned for you. His all-sufficient grace allows me to tap into HIS patience, HIS peace, HIS endurance, and HIS soft heart of compassion, if I will slow down enough to ask Him to help me and tune my heart to listen to His voice.

You don't have to be everything to everyone, but you can step into the calling that is just for you. Only you can be your child's mother. What an honor!

So, invite God into your day. Identify the thing that you've been finding confidence in before Him. Take off the plastic tiara! You have been crowned with something so much better. Hold your head high because you have access to the "all sufficient" Christ as his daughter. His grace, strength and character can clothe you in something more beautiful and stronger than your deepest childhood imagination could dream up.

QUESTIONS:

- *What do you turn to for your confidence and sufficiency?*
- *How can you remember that God has a beautiful calling just for you?*

WHAT YOU HAVE, NOT WHAT YOU IMAGINE

Proverbs 3:5-6, ESV: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*

“Your daughter has serious national potential,” the famous former Olympic gymnast told Kelly. “But she must get into private gymnastics coaching right away.”

Kelly was in turmoil. They could never afford a private coach for their eight-year-old daughter. She and her husband worked multiple jobs, with sporadic unemployment in his construction business. The comfortable life she had imagined had been replaced by the stress of making ends meet. Once Marissa’s talent became apparent, they raided savings to help pay for lessons and competitions. Brett wasn’t happy about it, but since he was the one who didn’t make enough money, Kelly wasn’t about to let him complain.

Kelly fumed: If God had given Marissa this gift, why wasn’t He providing the resources to maximize it? Why couldn’t He give her husband a better job?

All of us have ways that our dreams and prayers haven’t been answered in the way we would choose--and battered dreams can lead to battered hearts.

Maybe you dreamed of being a stay-at-home mom, but instead find yourself grieving a broken marriage and working full-time to pay the bills. Perhaps you’d always envisioned your kids growing up camping every weekend as you love to do –but your kids and husband have zero interest. Or you try to avoid your Tesla-driving friends seeing your

twelve-year-old minivan—which isn’t getting replaced anytime soon.

It’s easy to blame our earthly circumstances or someone else. It’s easy to have turmoil instead of contentment and peace.

For a time, Kelly allowed those thoughts to fester. Her marriage suffered. Her husband shut down. She shut herself off from God.

Then one day, she watched Brett and Marissa cuddling on the couch, watching TV. She was struck anew by how much they loved each other, and suddenly realized: God had given them this talented daughter, knowing that they would not have the money to pursue high-level gymnastics. So, God must have had a different purpose. Maybe it was simply to give Marissa something she loved doing!

Similarly, she realized, God had connected her and Brett, knowing that they would not be wealthy. Knowing that they would have to decide whether they would find joy in each other and be content in all circumstances. After all, their modest income was considered immeasurable wealth in most countries of the world! Maybe this situation was designed to help them find that contentment . . . if she would let it.

God’s view is bigger than ours. When our reality doesn’t match our expectations, yes, we pray and hope – but we also must allow God to be God. We must take a bigger perspective and allow Him to give us the peace we crave. Not because we get what we want, but because we trust in the One who loves us and always knows best.

QUESTIONS:

- *Do you sometimes feel like you are not getting the life you imagined? What are two or three of the main ways that you find yourself discontent?*
- *What are some reasons why God might be allowing those aspects of your life? What might He want to do in your life, and the life of your children, as a result?*

MELODI LEIH Instagram: @melodileih

WILD HOPE FOR LEADERS

We live in a world where hope can be hard to see. When you read or listen to news headlines or drive through a neighborhood made of cardboard houses or receive a call from a doctor with news you weren't expecting, it's easy to be discouraged and lose hope.

Maybe you have walked with a mom whose life has been torn apart by illness or hurt not quite knowing how to care for her. Maybe you're waiting for answers to prayer, finances to come through, or healing to come. Leading through challenges like these can leave us weary and wondering how to hold on to hope.

In Psalm 13, David questions God, asking how long God would forget him and "how long will you hide from me?" In this season, he wrestles with whether there is anything worth hoping for.

But then something happens in his heart. Scripture doesn't tell us what or how long it took, but it's as if he has this "light bulb" moment that causes him to remember. Verse five says, "But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing because he is good to me." In the midst of his big emotions and hopeless mindset, he remembers what is true of God.

As leaders, anchored in a relationship with Jesus, we are called to trust and dare to believe in hope that won't disappoint, but instead increases our faith in his unfailing

love for us. God is hope.

In Hebrews 11, we see that by faith the world was spoken into existence, by faith Enoch walked with God, by faith Noah built a boat, and by faith we have wild hope that perseveres through hard things and hope that is fulfilled in the promises of God.

Wild hope is an opportunity for us to **live with expectancy** believing God will do what he has promised. Our hope is not just wishful thinking, but instead, is tied to faith in God who is always working on our behalf, always making a way especially when we don't see one and always holding tight to our hand.

Hope.

When you don't understand, trust what you know is true of God.

When you are sad or unsettled, hope is your anchor.

When you don't see your own worth, he does.

When you can't see the way through, he walks with you.

Lord Jesus, remind us daily of that you are our hope. You see us in our greatest joys and deepest pain as you walk with us. Help us trust in your unfailing love and give us wild hope for our future. In Jesus name.

QUESTIONS:

- Do you need the reminder today that God sees you? Do you need the assurance of hope?
- What area in your life do you need to ask God to reaffirm your hope?

PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE

Romans 8:28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

What if everything you did actually mattered? Like . . . everything?

Letting someone go first at a four-way stop? Taking the time to level your scoops in the carafe before your MomCo meet up? Holding the door for the lady at the store?

What if that person was gripping the wheel, anxious about being late? What if the coffee being made just right blessed that mom who savored it? What if that door you held open would have been the last burden she needed?

What if the moments we take for granted are the moments that someone else sees God's grace?

What if our daily sowing will one day reap goodness that is felt through generations, spreading throughout the world like a true butterfly effect?

This is our wild hope as leaders, mothers, friends: that the daily work of our hands actually makes a difference and brings God glory in ways that can be unimaginable.

From the seemingly small work of our diligent hands can come a harvest that changes the world.

So may we treat the small, meaningless, daily choices with the reverence that they deserve.

May we go out today and look at every choice as an opportunity to sow a seed and wonder how God might make it blossom.

QUESTIONS:

- *What small seeds of hope have you planted recently?*
- *What do you hope will grow from them?*

YES, YOU!

John 15:16 : *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*

Quick, name an influential leader.

Which name popped into your head first?

Perhaps it was Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., or Susan B. Anthony.

Yes, they are all very influential leaders. But you know who else is? You. Yes, you!

Leadership is about influence and how we use it. Leaders are influencers. Today, the world defines influencers as people who have large social media followings and earn their living online. Sure, you can call that influence, but that's a pretty narrow definition. The truth is, every single one of us uses our influence daily whether we realize it or not.

When you comfort your child when they're afraid, you're leading and using your influence. When you text a mom in your Meetup to check on her and let her know you're praying for her, you're leading and using your influence. When you smile at the grocery store clerk and say hello, you're leading and using your influence.

As a MomCo leader, you are an integral part of influencing and impacting moms. You are helping them find community and introducing them to Jesus. You are helping them find hope in their everyday life and for eternity, which not only blesses them, but also their family - now and for generations to come!

God chose you to lead and make an impact on the lives of these women. Isn't it amazing?

I imagine that if you ask the moms in your Meetup to name an influential leader, they'll think of you. Yes, you!

QUESTIONS:

- *How can you use your influence to share the hope of Jesus?*
- *How can you use your influence to build up future leaders?*

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE

We all hear our elders say, “When I was your age . . .” at some point in our lives, right?

More than once I've caught myself saying the phrase when I hear my millennial children, nieces and nephews make a comment that has me quickly giving them another perspective.

My husband and I made a fierce goal before the children were born to do all we could, with God's help, to maintain communication with our children throughout their lives. I'd like to share a couple of things that helped us and may also help you.

Listen

Listening is a skill that we can continually improve upon. It requires us to be fully present and not distracted. It requires us to not speak while the person is speaking. Listen not to respond, but to understand. Ensure the person is finished with their thought before following up. I can still remember my son around seven years old telling me I was not listening to him. I thought I was, but I wasn't looking at him. He felt I was distracted with cooking and didn't really hear what he was trying to say to me.

Love

We've heard that actions speak louder than words. We all have different ways of demonstrating love. Millennials and Gen Zs are quicker to respond to our actions of love over just hearing us say, “I love you.”

Because visuals are so powerful, they want to see before they buy into our long discourse of how much we love them. When we read 1 Corinthians 13, there are plenty of verbs describing what love looks like. Take a read again and make notes.

Learn

The English language was complex when we were growing up, and can we agree that it has somehow become even more so as we navigate social media, new slang and emojis. Last week I was asked why Boomers like to use ellipses in our text messages and learned that sometimes younger folks think we're upset when too many ellipses are used. I was stunned and realized I had to relearn some things.

If you've ever felt discouraged when communicating with someone of a different generation, know that there is hope. Let's trust God to help guide us in communicating across the generations.

Remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12,

1 Corinthians 13:12 NLT: *Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.*

Be patient and ask yourself: How can I listen, love and learn with the generations in my sphere of influence?

QUESTIONS:

- What do you enjoy about the generations before and behind you?
- How does each generation bring value to your MomCo Meetup?

HOW TO NAVIGATE DIFFICULT TOPICS

I have never enjoyed arguments, debates, or even uncomfortable conversations. Some people thrive in these situations, but I avoid even political television shows because I am a bit conflict-avoidant, even though I know navigating difficult conversations is a daily occurrence.

Since childhood, I've often been told that my optimistic perspective is akin to "seeing the world through rose-colored glasses." Perhaps you're familiar with this saying. While it may ring true regarding how we perceive things and people at times, it's crucial to recognize that God doesn't view us through such tinted lenses. Instead, He sees us through what could be termed as "scarlet-colored glasses" — through the lens of His Son's shed blood, infused with love, redemption and grace. When we choose to follow Him, He marks us with His seal — the Holy Spirit. In the context of the New Testament, a seal wasn't merely a decorative stamp on an envelope; it bestowed value upon something, serving as a symbol of ownership and lending authenticity and validity to a document.

Do you grasp the significance for both you and me? The sole label of consequence, the one that truly defines us, is "God's beloved." He has imprinted us as His treasured possession. You belong to Him. And nothing, not even the most trying day on this earth, can alter that truth.

But it does not stop there. When we need to navigate difficult topics, with believers and non-believers alike, we need to act like beloved. Those who embrace their belovedness are more apt to be patient and peaceful and less likely to need to be right.

I created an acrostic recently to help give practical ways to be "GRACEful" in our conversations when the topics are hard to navigate:

God's character – we must remember who God is and how He sees us.

Recognize the imperfections – no matter how difficult, we must be willing to admit that our perspective may be imperfect.

Allow yourself to see others as created by God – the person on the other side of this topic is an image-bearer of God, and we should act accordingly – even if they do not.

Challenge yourself to ask questions - they can be a rich environment for understanding, unity and empathy to grow.

Evaluate things through the filter of prayer – before you dive into a debate, make sure you have prayed it through and asked for wisdom and listening ears

QUESTIONS:

Read Romans 12:18

- *Do you consider yourself a peaceful person?*
- *What is your responsibility according to this verse?*
- *Which part of the "GRACE" acrostic is hardest for you to practice?*
- *With whom do you need to have a difficult conversation?*