

A photograph of a woman in a bright yellow dress holding a young child. The child's hands and feet are covered in dark mud, which is smeared onto the woman's yellow dress. The child is wearing a red and white striped top. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

CATHERINE McNIEL

*Long Days of Small Things*

MOTHERHOOD AS  
A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Motherhood is about the sculpting of souls, and Catherine McNeil hands you desperately needed tools. Not only for the formation of your family—but for your own soul. Let God do a holy, needful work through the pages you hold in your hands.

**ANN VOSKAMP**

Mother of seven and author of *New York Times* bestsellers *The Broken Way* and *One Thousand Gifts*

Catherine has written so beautifully of a woman's spiritual pathway to God. She has found the words to express what so many of us experience: repetitiveness of service that becomes a mysterious celebration of the sacredness of life and the presence of God. I wish I had written this book myself: a book that celebrates the spaghetti days of family, the wonder of pregnancy and birthing, and, above all, the sacredness of the journey.

**VALERIE BELL**

President and CEO of AWANA and author of *Getting Out of Your Kids' Faces and Into Their Hearts* and *Faith-Shaped Kids*

Writing in the tradition of Brother Lawrence, Catherine McNeil shows readers how to keep company with God in the everyday. But she is no monastic. She is a mother, caught in the turbulence of life with small children. How I wish I'd had this book—and her example—when I was just beginning my journey into motherhood.

**JEN POLLOCK MICHEL**

Author of the award-winning book *Teach Us to Want*

Here's a book for every Christian parent forced to smile through an exhortation to "enjoy every moment; it's all over so fast!" Catherine McNeil doesn't urge you to "make time for God" in early parenting but rather to see God there already: in the trial, in the joy, in the leaky diapers, plugged ducts, and scraped knees. Instead of being one more call to "sleep when the baby sleeps," her book can help a weary parent wake up a bit more to the eternal life they're living.

**TED OLSEN**

Director of editorial development, *Christianity Today*

Catherine's words are nothing short of a banquet table of nourishment for a hungry mama's soul. *Long Days of Small Things* invites the reader to see the mundane tasks of motherhood (changing diapers, folding laundry, planning meals, etc.) not as interruptions to our spiritual life, but as an oft-overlooked path closer to Jesus. Accept Catherine's invitation, mom. Read and be seen, feel valued, and awaken to the beautiful, spiritual practice of motherhood.

**AUBREY SAMPSON**

Author of *Overcomer: Breaking Down the Walls of Shame and Rebuilding Your Soul*

Moms, if you don't have time to read a book, this is the book for you! If you hunger to connect to God, these words will nourish your deep places. On every page you will be reminded that your children don't distract you from the way—they are the way to a richer, more meaningful life. Offering simple doable practices to connect to God, McNeil's beautifully woven words will strengthen you for your journey.

**MARGOT STARBUCK**

Author of *Small Things with Great Love: Adventures in Loving Your Neighbor*

*Long Days of Small Things* is a mom's welcomed guide to finding grace in each moment. Writing profoundly about the wonder of creating and nurturing a new human life, Catherine McNeil explains simple ways to practice God's presence in daily routines. These practical suggestions put worship within reach of every busy mom, gently explaining how to live in the present to find God in the chaos of chasing kids. This book will change how you view motherhood. It will change how you view life!

**JAN AND MARK FOREMAN**

Authors of *Never Say No: Raising Big-Picture Kids*

When my six children were small, I often thought I needed peace and space to grow my spirit. Wrong. God had six teachers in front

of me all along. What I really needed was McNiel's book to open my eyes to the miraculous presence of God already in front of me. What a spectacular guide into the holy daily labor of loving our kids.

**LESLIE LEYLAND FIELDS**

Author of *Crossing the Waters: Following Jesus through the Storms, the Fish, the Doubt, and the Seas*

For many long centuries the disciplined spiritual life has been largely defined by religious communities and leaders who are predominantly male. Cut off from the presence of young families—crying infants, riotous children, nursing mothers—the spiritual disciplines we've been taught are generally about cultivating the life of the mind. What happens when a mom like Catherine McNiel enters the conversation? A delightful introduction into a whole new world of incarnational disciplines that take the body seriously. We are bodies; we take care of others' bodies. And in the daily stuff of embodiment, Catherine reminds us, is where we can meet our incarnational God.

**SARAH ARTHUR**

Coauthor of *The Year of Small Things: Radical Faith for the Rest of Us*

*Long Days of Small Things* is a gift to all of us householders. Catherine's patient and generous wisdom shines a light into the sleepless nights of parenting to reveal the spiritual work happening when we're busy cleaning up soggy Cheerios and endless glasses of spilled milk. I want to give this to every mom I know, to say, "Good job, brave mom. You're in the trenches of what matters most."

**TRICIA LOTT WILLIFORD**

Author of *Let's Pretend We're Normal, And Life Comes Back*, and *You Can Do This*

When I was a mother of three young children, there was never enough time for spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, worship, and service. I came to realize I was chasing a shimmering

false image of spiritual growth instead of living fully in the company of my heavenly Father. Catherine McNeil offers mothers a freeing, wise invitation to grow deep roots in the rich soil of family life. She connects some of the classic spiritual disciplines to the embodied realities of parenting. Her wise, thoughtful words and eminently practical suggestions will help you flourish in the presence of God during those long days with little ones. Highly recommended.

MICHELLE VAN LOON

Author of *Moments & Days: How Our Holy Celebrations Shape Our Faith*

Catherine's well-crafted prose will leave you wanting more, while the weight behind her words—words that underscore all you already have and are—will entice you to reread entire paragraphs five times. *Long Days of Small Things* is a timeless gem, celebrating the beauty of motherhood in fresh, profound ways.

JESSIE MINASSIAN

Author, speaker, and mother

Catherine McNeil claims that motherhood is a spiritual discipline. In this beautiful book, she demonstrates that parenting is holy and transformative—from the incarnational glory of childbearing to the trying tedium of sleepless nights. McNeil writes with the grace and confidence of a midwife, and *Long Days of Small Things* is just that—a work of spiritual midwifery that will comfort, encourage, and strengthen mothers.

KATHERINE WILLIS PERSHEY

Author of *Very Married: Field Notes on Love and Fidelity*

*Long Days of Small Things*





CATHERINE McNIEL

*Long Days of Small Things*

MOTHERHOOD AS  
A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE



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The Team:

Don Pape, Publisher

Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions and Developmental Editor

Nicole Grimes, Designer

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# Before We Begin



## CAN I MAKE A CONFESSION?

I am not *that mom* on Facebook who has it all together, peacefully raising perfect children. You'll never find me Instagramming my latest parenting triumph or pinning pretzel-and-kiwi Easter bunnies to Pinterest.

I don't even have a Pinterest account.

I'm the mom yelling across the yard loudly enough to wake the whole neighborhood. The one who doesn't manage to grab a shower and would never consider rising before her crack-of-dawn children.

I serve birthday cake out of a 9x13 pan, and my kids go to church in striped pants and paisley shirts (dirty ones, too, with mismatched socks). My runaway bag is packed, and I'm always just one more tantrum away from using it. I never manage to find the peace in the chaos. I long for serenity and fall to pieces in the mayhem.

I am not winning at motherhood.

But—and I take a long, slow breath with this life-changing

*but*—I believe, with all my heart, that every department-store meltdown is cultivating my soul into something strong and beautiful. I cling to a deep and certain conviction that motherhood is *in and of itself* a spiritual practice—that the Creator of wombs and breasts placed deep spiritual fruit into the seasons and tasks of motherhood. That we’re not meant to add more “shoulds” to our schedule, more work to allow us into God’s presence. That instead our Father beckons us to simply awaken and see the spiritual disciplines *we already perform each day*.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—we may not realize it, but a harvest is being formed in our souls as we ebb and flow through sleepless nights and chaotic days. Just as certainly and invisibly as the seeds in my garden somehow turn into carrots and potatoes out of sight, below the surface our spirits are being formed in the secret corners of motherhood.

Don’t think that I find it easy. The pieces don’t fall right into place for me. Nobody could mistake me for a modern-day Madonna, presiding over my cherubic angels. No, this journey strikes me as spiritual because I am so flawed it simply *must* be. If this trial by fire does not burn away my edges, nothing will.

Here is my invitation: Walk with me in these pages through daily life, with all its beauty and pain. We’ll look honestly at the journey of motherhood and the spiritual fruit that hides there. To keep it real, following each chapter are three “practices” we’re already doing—things like breathing,

washing dishes, and driving the car—with practical tips on how these everyday tasks can shape our spirits.

You'll recognize all the landmarks, the highs and the lows, but it can be difficult to notice how powerful and life-giving they are when we're in the thick of it all. We're walking together this time, so we can help each other see along the way.<sup>1</sup>

So let's journey together as we labor and deliver our children, day after day after day. Whether we birthed or adopted our children, the labor and delivery never really stops, does it? We mamas pour ourselves out from beginning to end so that others may have life. This pouring-out is a rich spiritual practice, if we awaken to it. And since we are *doing* it already, all that remains for us is to breathe deeply and begin to drink.

My prayer is that in these pages you will glimpse, occasionally, this beautiful something always lurking in the chaos and the struggle.

I'm convinced it is God himself, waiting right here where he made you.

Will you join me?

---

<sup>1</sup> Since I'm speaking to *you*, sister, I'll use words like *mothers*. But it's important you understand that I'm not excluding men or implying that our responsibilities are "women's work." I hope men are reading along! Many dads walk a nearly identical parenting journey right beside us and are being shaped spiritually by the everyday, just as we are. So to every dad reading this book, welcome. We're so grateful to be in the thick of this with you.







CHAPTER I

# REDEMPTION

*Finding the Householders' Path*



I WEAVE MY WAY through the crowded sanctuary, crying baby in the sling. I'm earnestly trying to get out of the church service and into the "cry" room before the fussing becomes screaming. His little eyes are closed, but his crumpled face is beet red. With cheeks rubbing frantically against my chest, he's winding up for a major demonstration. I walk faster.

When you have small children, going anywhere can seem like more trouble than it's worth. Church is no exception: a lot of hassle in order to perform the same childcare tasks in a less conducive environment. We are visitors at this church today. I long to be present, focused, and engaged. Instead, this outing becomes one more opportunity to be banished from adult teaching and corporate worship.

Finding the right room, I pause and read the sign on the door: *Breastfeeding Mothers Only*. My heart sinks. Not only am I to be relegated to a closet with a demanding baby, but my sex and lactation determine that I am the only one in the family who can be. No chance of Daddy or Grandma taking a shift later, I guess. I put a resentful hand on the knob and push the door open.

My senses and emotions flood before my mind has a chance to take it in. The setting offers itself immediately as sanctuary. The room is dimly lit, perfect for soothing a child—or a mama’s soul. The furniture is nice, comfortable. All my needs are anticipated: nursing pillows and tissue, a water pitcher and glasses. A silver tray is laid out for Communion, awaiting my participation. Next to it is a plaque that reads, “*Mother, what you have given in love has become part of me. I thank God always for you.*”

Immediately tears are rolling down my face. I hadn’t known that I felt invisible until I felt seen. I hadn’t realized how thankless the ceaseless sacrifices of motherhood felt until someone gently pointed me to their honor and value.

## Missed Adventures

I’ve always been a bookworm, and quite a few of my childhood BFFs were fictional. Frodo and Sam. Arthur and Merlin. My imagination was ignited as I lived through their adventures, but when I tried to picture *myself* in their stories, I just couldn’t. The hero and his buddies were usually

## REDEMPTION

male; the womenfolk stayed back at camp during the real adventure. In all likelihood these women were having their own meaningful experiences, but *those* stories didn't make the book. It dawned on me that in my favorite epics, had I been there, I wouldn't *be* there. Without knowing it, I had imbibed a love of courage and inspiration—and a suspicion that there are beautiful places and quests to which women are not invited.

My life outside the pages, however, has seen no end of adventures. Topping the list is this miracle I've been caught up in for the past ten years: creating, birthing, and nurturing three brand-new souls. My children.

But as almost any mom can tell you, it's easy to get lost along the way. We're often playing the role of those who stayed behind to tend the fire, those whose stories fade into history untold and unsung. Again and again we stumble upon the message that the demands of motherhood will keep us from the most thrilling excursions.

Spiritual journeys, for instance. Investing time and energy into seeking God and his presence throughout the day. Loving and serving others in his name. Fellowshiping joyfully in community.

This is one adventure that does not drop easily from my hands. It haunts me like a song I can't place, like a delicious scent wafting on the winds of memory. It is the ambition I cannot quite let die.

Do you feel this too? Do you ache to connect with God, to love and serve others well? Does your soul long to be

filled—and yet finds itself drying up in the busy stretches of every long day? When motherhood leaves us parched, where are we to find the time and energy for such a quest?

True and lasting spiritual growth comes from practicing spiritual disciplines over time, as Christian teaching and generations of seekers can attest. Our goal isn't to earn God's love or catch his attention, but to exercise and build our spiritual muscles. By investing our time and energy in pursuing God, our hearts and minds are changed; we begin to find him, to make a place for him in our spirits, our thoughts, and our identity.

Richard Foster's important book *Celebration of Discipline* outlines twelve practices that form the backbone of such a life: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.<sup>1</sup> Before becoming a mother, I eagerly embraced as many of these as my responsibilities allowed.

Now, my responsibilities rarely allow me to take a shower, much less sharpen spiritual practices. Silence and solitude? Never, ever, day or night. Prayer? Harder than you'd think after years of sleep deprivation. Fasting? Not while pregnant or breastfeeding. Service? Well, my kids definitely left their mark that time we "helped" at community painting day. Worship? There were years I didn't attend a worship service without a toddler bouncing on my back.

As mothers, our accumulated experience speaks a compelling case: Pursuing a deep spiritual life is simply not possible in this season, at least not in the ways we were taught. It

seems the spiritual quest is one place where mothers, at least, cannot go.

That, or I'm really botching it.

## Doorways and Forgotten Paths

I'm ready to leave the shop, but one thing stands in my way—the door. Not exactly a formidable barrier, but the odds are against me. My preschooler is running in circles, while my toddler pulls at my left hand. My right hand grips this terribly unwieldy baby carrier. Inside the carrier is, of course, my infant daughter. She is hungry and tired and howling. My purse is falling off one shoulder, my diaper bag off the other. Children are asking about snacks and water fountains, and I'm wondering, *How are we all going to get through that door?*

No one jumps to hold it open for me, though more than enough people are watching to ensure my embarrassment when I attempt to hold it for myself. Myself, that is, and my entourage: these three precious ones who know life only through my own life, who see me as the primary source of all things. Somehow, with bags crashing down against my forearms, I bang open the door with my hip, weave the toddler under one arm, and lift the baby carrier over the preschooler's head. Somehow, we all stumble through before it closes on any small fingers or toes.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have done it. I have walked through a door.

Later that day I read an article about a Christian teacher I deeply admire. The writer described this hero-of-the-faith as so spiritually enlightened, he radiated peace just by walking through the door.

This stops me in my tracks. It testifies mightily against me, against the fruit of my life in this season. I'm not *quite* the picture of enlightenment. If radiating peace (with or without a door) is the measure of spiritual success, I'm certain I'll never arrive.

---

A few months before my door-opening heroics, I stole away into adult world for a weekend to attend a Christian conference. In the hot, crowded room, the speaker drove his point home with passion: If we have a genuine commitment to knowing God, we must spend at least an hour each day in silence and solitude.

There I was, ground to a halt once again. About to birth my third child in five years (the soon-to-be daughter in the infant carrier), I hadn't slept through the night or gone to the bathroom by myself anytime in recent memory. My physical body housed a tiny tenant; I was literally inseparable from this beloved person I nurtured. This simple suggestion of solitude—one I would have recommended myself in a different season—stole my breath away.

I didn't hear anything else at the conference, because these words reverberated through my ears and soul for weeks, drowning out everything else. The list of spiritual disciplines

no longer feasible to me as a mother grows longer with each new child. And, of course, any thought of silence and solitude is a happy dream mostly forgotten.

No one tries to exclude mothers from the “spiritual life,” but it happens regardless. I hear laments rising up in the hearts of mothers, mourning the losses that this season of nurturing unexpectedly brings: the impossibility of pursuing something soul-creative, something life-giving. *There’s no time, space, energy, or money. We’ll have to wait until the children are older. Right now I just can’t.*

And yet. Underneath my unwashed hair and sleepy eyes, the truth is undeniable: These days have been made out of miracles. Uniquely and utterly *female* miracles. Pregnancy, labor, delivery, newborn days, and nurturing growing children have taken me to places where *only* women and mothers can go. These fundamental experiences are inescapably feminine, not experienced by all women but by *only women*. If our daily experiences are so entirely singular, why shouldn’t our spiritual disciplines be uniquely suited to us as well?

So now, almost a decade into the most grueling journey of selfless giving and sacrifice I can imagine, my spirit is fighting back. *There must be another path.*

Children are consuming. They leave us with nothing left to give ourselves or anyone else. But this is the perfect training ground for our spirits, the very setting many disciplines are designed to produce. Our demanding, beloved children *are* what we create—they *are* our spiritual path. What if we looked through new eyes and discovered that into our very



life stages our Creator has placed impressions of himself, reflections of his strength and beauty, a spiritual path laid out just for us?

---

People who walk serenely through doorways are rarely surrounded by children. In fact, those who achieve acclaim for their great accomplishments of faith rarely spend their days birthing, nursing, and raising families.

Jesus loved children, spent time with them, and instructed his followers to be like them. But he wasn't raising them. Moses, the apostle Paul, C. S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, Saint Francis, Martin Luther, Thomas Merton—none of these people spent their days raising children.

And yet, what else is so enlightening, so character-sharpening, so weakness-illuminating, and so virtue-defining as the nonstop practice of self-sacrifice and surrender that defines motherhood? If a deep, rich spiritual life requires personal time and space, most people throughout history—hard workers living in crowded homes, striving to care for their families and just barely getting by—are simply out of luck.

Immersed now in these long days of small things, I understand why so few women traveled with Sam and Frodo, Arthur and Merlin: They were very, very busy. For most of human history, women began bearing children as young teenagers, then went on to be pregnant or nursing for the bulk of their lives. Imagine the wisdom, the understanding, and the spiritual depth that was fashioned in the

souls of these women as they emptied themselves day in and day out, body and soul, often giving up their lives in the making and birthing of babies. These women were constantly in the grips of life and death, searching and expanding the depths of human love and spirit, chasing toddlers, trying to gather enough food to sustain a family, feeling babies kick their bladders and ribs, mourning loss after incomparable loss, nurturing life after precious life.

Their years revolved around surrender, sacrifice, service, and perseverance. They acted out the signature works of God in their bodies: creation, new life, and redemption. Though the spiritual adventures of these mothers—close to the campfire and far from the fires of Mordor—did not make the pages of epic tales, their seasons and practices tell a deeply spiritual story.

But each day has enough trouble of its own, doesn't it? When we're in the thick of things, it's hard to see the bigger picture.

Some religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, have a name for people in this predicament: *householders*. Recognizing that folks can't just up and leave their spouses or children, these religions give householders a different set of expectations. Rather than becoming meditating monks, studying under gurus and wandering alone through the forest, householders are asked, for now, simply to be faithful in responsibility.

Though we mamas may appear half crazed, sleep-deprived, harried, and unkempt, our souls are being taught

and sharpened and purified. I'm sure of it. We're not able to sit and ponder this, or even be aware of it most of the time. But soul refining is the work of struggle, sacrifice, discomfort, and perseverance. My three whirling dervishes take me to the end of myself on a daily basis, and I'm certain my soul will emerge stronger for it.

Maybe Mommy Boot Camp cultivates a soul even better than spending these years in constant meditation.

---

The morning I ran out of the church sanctuary with a loud, hungry infant, my heart sank when I read the words *Breastfeeding Mothers Only*. My experiences and disappointments taught me that the services required by motherhood meant my spirit must go without. Instead, that day I opened the door to something far different from anything I had ever heard preached or described before, something available only to mothers. Not a “make do” or “Plan B” sort of path, but something unique and honored, inherently spiritual and inherently “mother.” Far from being relegated to a closet, I nursed and rocked my baby in tranquility. Far from being singled out for a lesser experience because I am a breastfeeding mother, I lingered in the refuge created just for me.

Friend, whatever form motherhood takes for you—conception or adoption; stay-at-home, work-from-home, or work-outside-the-home; going it alone or surrounded by support—yours is a journey of deep spiritual value. The spiritual life *is not* only for those with the freedom to sit quietly

and meditate, but also for those of us who are called away to continue giving deeply of ourselves.



REDEMPTION IN PRACTICE

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*Breathe*

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Even at our most overwhelmed and exhausted, we breathe. Every few seconds we receive the air of life into our bodies . . . and release. For a moment we rest, suspended and surrendered, in the space between. And then we repeat—again, and again, and again. This cycle is never broken, awake or asleep, stressed or at peace, happy or sad, for as long as we live.

This is the starting point, the place in which we begin to see our daily cycles and tasks as spiritual disciplines. By taking a moment to listen to the sound of our own breath, we quiet ourselves. Try this: Breathe in slowly and deeply—then hold for a second. Breathe out slowly and completely—then observe that moment between breaths. In the space of a few minutes try to think only of inhaling, exhaling, and rest. As your mind begins to wander, gently return it to your breathing.

It is one thing to do this while sitting quietly alone and

another while you're chasing kids down the grocery-store aisle. Our goal is not to be mindful of *every* breath, but of *some* breath. Try at first to notice your breathing once during the day, and over time it will develop into a habit. Post notes in your house, car, or phone, reminding yourself to *just breathe*. Inhale deeply and realize you are breathing in God's unfailing love. Exhale and release into his unceasing presence.

Suddenly, breathing—your easiest daily accomplishment—is an act of worship, meditation, and prayer.

## PRACTICE

- *Be aware.* As often as you remember, consciously notice the rise and fall of your breathing.
- *Be intentional.* Once you are aware, intentionally inhale deeply, hold for a moment, and exhale completely. Take a moment to experience the pause between breaths.
- *Worship through breathing.* As you breathe deeply, consider with gratitude the life God's Spirit has placed in your body, his presence in this very moment, and the peace his love provides. Choose a one-word prayer to whisper to him in your heart as you exhale.

*The Spirit of God has made me;  
the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*

JOB 33:4

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*Walk*

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Moms walk everywhere: up the stairs to get a diaper, down the stairs to do the laundry, into the other room to pick up the crying baby, through the department-store aisles, to the park so the kids can play. Without adding anything to our daily list, the walking we do can become a spiritual practice.

As you walk, try to notice the feel of the ground as your feet touch the floor. Hard wood, cool tile, soft carpet, dew-drenched grass. Whether you're walking barefoot or clad in boots, notice the way your feet meet the ground and push off again.

This awareness literally grounds us to our present place and moment—I am *here*, and I am here *now*. This same here and now is where God meets us, and this grounding allows us to stay present in his peace. As we focus on feeling the floor beneath our feet, each footstep can become a prayer.

Remember that God's love is the foundation we walk on, as sure and inescapable as the gravity that holds us in place. Of course, this will be harder to remember when you're walking toward a food fight or rescuing a toddler from toilet diving, but leave reminders for yourself around the house that when you walk, you walk in God's presence.

**PRACTICE**

- *Be aware.* As often as you can, take note of your steps, the ground beneath you, the muscles and movement

of your feet. Realize that you are *here*. Stay present in this place.

- *Go slowly.* Unless there is a real emergency or you're running for the joy of it, don't rush. Take the time to experience the moment and day you are living: For better or worse, once it passes, it will be gone.
- *Remember the foundation.* God's love surrounds us: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). And this includes walking. As you take the steps each day requires, remember that you are grounded upon the solid rock.

*For in him we live and move and have our being.*

ACTS 17:28

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*Be*

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It happens every time we moms step foot outside the house—someone implores us to cherish every moment with our children. We can't go anywhere without hearing, "Enjoy them while they're young! It goes too fast." The more appalling our children are that day, the more likely we are to be bombarded by this conversation. Cherishing every moment is easier said than done during a tantrum at Target. The whole idea becomes one more sure sign of failure.

It, too, seems like a ridiculous demand when we're in the thick of 24-7 caregiving shifts. The key to seeing motherhood as a spiritual discipline, however, is cultivating the

ability to stay present in our daily tasks, to reap value from our actual circumstances. How can we do this after weeks of sleepless nights, when we've nearly lost sight of ourselves and any sense of perspective?

As with each of these practices, start where you're at—and start small. The goal is not one long victorious day of cherishing, but one single moment of awareness in the midst of all that's going on.

Does your baby look adorable when he triumphantly wrestles the teething ring into his mouth? Is the sun reflecting off your toddler's soft hair? Does your daughter's face light up as she describes her schoolyard adventures? For one second, just one moment, let go of all that burden of stress and exhaustion, and stay in that place. Experience it fully, recording it into your consciousness. Let your gaze rest on what is in front of you—your precocious child, the brilliant sky, or the powerful emotion. Whether the moment is a blessing or a challenge, realize that right now, *right now*, you are alive. You haven't always been and you won't always be, but right now you are *here*, in God's presence.

For just a moment, dip your toes into the water and experience *being*.

## PRACTICE

- *One moment.* Instead of a goal that will result in a longer “didn't do it right” list, aim for one moment in your day when you are present in your body and with the people around you. In the midst of a busy day, use



your breathing and walking exercises to quiet yourself and arrive in the present.

- *Notice the little things.* The sound of your child's voice, the softness of his new skin, the strength of her growing body. These are the moments we don't want to miss, and they can trigger us from the chaos in our heads and hearts and into the present.
- *Rejoice in the gift of being.* These little things in life point us to a profound reason to rejoice: In this moment we have life and breath. These are gifts from God, and it is in him and through him and to him that we exist. Even in the dark days, there is this blessing—and for a moment we can grasp on and hold it. Offer a word of praise and thanksgiving to the Giver of all things.

*From him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

ROMANS 11:36

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