

FOREWORD BY ELYSE FITZPATRICK

Cruciform Press

CHRIST IN THE

CHAOS

HOW THE GOSPEL CHANGES
MOTHERHOOD

Kim Crandall

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How the Gospel Changes Motherhood

Kimm Crandall

Cruciform Press | March, 2013

For Justin,
whose love and grace for me keep me going.
And for Grace, Jonah, Lily, and Jackson.
Without you my life would lack adventure. May you
grow up knowing you are loved and adored by the
greatest Super Hero of them all.

– Kimm Crandall

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“What an amazingly wild and wise, disruptive and delighting, freeing and focusing book on gospel parenting my new friend, Kimm Crandall, has written. The heck with this just being for mothers, Kimm’s book is for every parent willing to take the stewardship of children and the riches of the gospel seriously. This is one of the most helpful and encouraging books on parenting I’ve read in the past twenty years, of any length. Kimm writes as a multi-child mom and a grace-saturated woman who understands the exhausting demands of good parenting and the inexhaustible supply of God’s grace. This will be a book you will want to give to parents, to-be parents, and grandparents.”

Scotty Smith, Founding Pastor of Christ Community Church, Franklin, TN. Author of *Objects of His Affection*, *Restoring Broken Things*, and *Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel Centered Faith*

“Although Kimm Crandall’s message in *Christ in the Chaos* would revive any soul longing for the breath of the gospel of grace, I am especially eager to recommend this book to that heart who strives to know God and to make him known to the little ones who call her ‘momma.’ Kimm is a candid and gracious fellow sojourner, faithfully pointing to God’s immeasurable steadfast love and grace in the midst of our mess. She helps us peer beyond what our eyes can see to behold the glorious end on which our hearts can rest.”

Lauren Chandler, wife of Matt Chandler (pastor of The Village Church), mother of 3, writer, singer and speaker

“What a healing balm this book has been to my heart. In *Christ in the Chaos*, my dear friend Kimm points us to the rest that every mother longs for. This rest that each tired and burdened mom needs is found in the work that Christ has done. Kimm shows us how the gospel changes our motherhood from a drudgery to a joy. She helps us to see that Christ meets us in the

middle of our everyday and loves us in the midst of our failures. She gives us the truth of free grace that unshackles us from trying to be the mom of the year. Kimm makes herself small and makes Christ big. I pray each mom who finds this book falls more in love with her Savior and becomes more aware of how his love for her changes everything about her.”

Jessica Thompson, Co-author of *Give them Grace*

“Jesus tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Why, then, as a mom of a rapidly growing family did I feel as if I were carrying the weight of the world and these children on my shoulders alone? I had forgotten the gospel and instead was piling on the ‘have-to’s’ that promised to fulfill me as a wife, give me purpose as a mother, and produce guaranteed spiritual kids. I just wish I had read and absorbed the truths that Kimm so gently reminds us of as mothers: Christ is not only in the chaos, he sees you, loves you, and is beckoning you to rest in the work he has already completed.”

Kendra Fletcher, Homeschool mother of eight and blogger at PreschoolersAndPeace.com

“As mothers we are tempted to stack up our maternal achievements as a measure of our godliness. Consider Kimm’s book as a megaphone—loud and clear—calling out the better way: Moms need to build their hope on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. Read this book in the context of community and see how the gospel intersects and powerfully affects the details of your motherhood and friendships.”

Gloria Furman, author of *Glimpses of Grace*

“Few people on the planet know chaos better than moms of young children. Wanting everything to be right, safe, and in order, moms know that it rarely is. This easily leads to feelings of fear, guilt, and exasperation. My friend Kimm Crandall lives in the trenches of motherhood and has discovered that chaos

can be the perfect context to experience God's liberating grace. She is a wise, practical, gospel-drenched guide for anyone navigating through the wearisome terrain of parenting. I highly recommend this book and hope that it's the first of many from Mrs. Crandall."

Tullian Tchividjian, Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and author of *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free*

"Let's be honest, motherhood—though a great joy—can be quite chaotic. Kimm Crandall, mother of four and author of *Christ in the Chaos*, knows this all too well and wants to encourage us that God is there with us through every sickness, messy room, baseball game, trial, and joy. Kimm had learned to do all the right things like so many Christians do, yet when her performance and good works weren't bringing her joy and contentment, she broke. Part of the chaos of motherhood may not be external at all, but rather an internal chaos produced by striving to be the perfect mom and forgetting our identity in Christ. This identity, as Kimm explains, is rooted in a perfect love for an imperfect mom. Our greatest need as mothers isn't the latest news and trends, our greatest need is Christ. Kimm gently but boldly reminds us that our performance won't sustain us. We need the sweet and gracious mercy and love of God found in the cross of Christ—found in our chaos."

Trillia Newbell, author and editor of *Women of God Magazine*

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FOREWORD

More Than Chaotic Circumstances

It's been quite some time since I had children in my home—at least for more than an evening's sleepover. Yes, I've raised three children, but my youngest is now a 35-year-old father of two. And although I do have six really adorable grandchildren, they don't live with me permanently, and when things get chaotic with them, it's not long until their parents take them home and I breathe a sigh of relief. My “mothering” years are pretty much over and have been for quite some time.

In light of that reality, you might wonder why I'm writing the Foreword to a book for moms in the midst of chaos. After all, with just me and Phil at home now, I wouldn't describe our well-ordered days and quiet evenings as “chaotic.” So it may not seem logical for me to write this foreword, but actually it is the most logical thing in the world. That's because even though I don't have the circumstantial chaos of four kids under the age of 10 like Kimm does, I am well acquainted with my own chaotic heart. And I know heart chaos is the result of a worship disorder, not circumstances. We all have that in common, so whether you have two kids or 12, this book will be helpful for you.

You see, a heart in turmoil isn't that way because of circumstances. No, circumstances only push to the forefront what's already there—the chaos hidden in the heart. Heart chaos is a result of the inward worship of self: worship of my own abilities to merit God's favor and approve of myself, the desire to compare my success with others, the longing to know that deep down I'm really okay. Heart chaos comes from thinking that all the goodness in my personal world (especially the salvation of my children and grandchildren) depends on my getting my act together. Chaos is a worship disorder: it results from worship of myself, my abilities, my plans, me. It happens when I believe the lies that if I could just “try harder” and “do better” everything would be okay.

Chaos doesn't turn into peace simply because I've read a book or gone to a seminar. It isn't solved by making concise lists and being able to look at others and know I am finally doing “it” (whatever “it” happens to be—parenting, grandparenting, you name it) right. Chaos turns into peace when the Prince of Peace speaks deeply into your heart and tells you, “Be still. I am God. I've got this.”

This is the truth Kimm has learned in the crucible of her own personal chaos. She has struggled with her own heart—a heart that longed to find the key that would make everything, especially her family and by extension her own existence, okay. You might be surprised by her candor. She isn't pretending to be a great mom (though she's a faithful one). She isn't pretending to be sinless (though she loves holiness). And, thankfully, she doesn't give you any helpful hints or long lists of how to be like her. She struggles. She loves. She sins. She repents. She

struggles... again. But she has faith in the God who loves sinners and sent his Son to make everything more than okay.

Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again so parents would know forgiveness for their sins and freedom in righteousness. This book will remind you of that truth—the truth of a Christ who persevered through a furnace of wrath while all he had known deconstructed and became chaos around him. It is all we need to know.

Yes, this book is primarily written for moms, but it really is for anyone—even old grandmas like me. That’s because we all need the message of this book: I am a sinner, but I’ve been loved and welcomed. This message alone will bring peace to my troubled soul. You don’t need more “to-do” lists. You don’t need to “try harder” or “do better”. What you need is for your chaotic heart to remember the gospel.

So read this book. Buy extra copies. Pass them out. Find Christ in your chaos and watch your chaotic heart change.

– Elyse Fitzpatrick

INTRODUCTION

Something odd happens when a woman becomes a mother. The change begins the moment she finds out she is pregnant. It starts within, as her sense of identity shifts. Soon, as if by some irresistible force, books, pamphlets, and coupons of an entirely different kind begin to enter her life. New expectations appear, too. A new mother can spend her entire pregnancy feeling the pressure of eating right, exercising enough, gaining just the right amount of weight, gathering the countless things a baby needs, researching the best way to labor and feed and diaper. The list goes on and on.

Then the baby comes—a beautiful, perfect little bundle of blessing. Somehow, though, within a few days the “mom laws” always show up at the doorstep with a great thud, a massive manual of seemingly non-negotiable do’s and don’ts which can crush the spirit of wonder and excitement a new baby brings. Many moms dutifully drag this manual inside, crack it open, and strive to live by its unyielding dictates. I know I did.

In chapter one of the mom manual, we find our identity in the unique chaos of diapers, strollers, and feeding schedules. We arrive at chapter two and live in the world of baby food and play dates. Chapter three covers school pictures and piano lessons. As the book continues,

we move through the teen years, on into college and young adulthood. At every turn in our lives, the lesson is relentlessly reinforced: thou shalt not disobey the mom manual. Whether through books, blogs, or even the pressure of other moms (be it spoken or unspoken) it can seem as though life has been reduced to a single standard, one that is both iron-clad yet somewhat vague: the value of our motherhood stands or falls on how well we follow the manual.

The book you now hold in your hands is for moms who sense that the manual is not the last word. Moms who have been beaten down by endless demands to simply “try harder” and “do better.” Moms starved of grace. Moms who have been told they must perform to a specific standard if they want to be godly women.

This book is for moms who need to hear how the gospel changes motherhood.

As a mother, I need to hear over and over the good news that Christ came to be my friend when I hated him. (Because some days, it looks like I still do.) I need to hear the good news that he lived a perfect sinless life on my behalf because he knew just how much I would make a mess of things. (Which I do on a regular basis.) He knew at times I would yell at my kids (yes), not desire my husband (it happens), and want to run away screaming (which happens surprisingly often). He knew my doubts and fears, and he knew I could never live a life acceptable to his perfect standard. So he lived . . . for me.

Jesus lived without ever letting a twinge of impatience color his voice. In crowded settings, he never got annoyed at all of the touching, and he never treated others as less important than himself. But here’s where the Christian version of the mom manual so often gets it wrong—Jesus

didn't do all this so I could primarily focus on trying harder and asking "What would Jesus do?" every time chaos ensues.

Jesus is not only my example...He is my replacement.

Jesus came to do everything I haven't done and could never do, and he did it sinless and perfectly. Then, he died the perfect death for my righteousness.

Not once did he open his mouth when falsely accused, nor lash out at those who didn't believe. In quietness he was beaten, stripped, and nailed to a beam of wood, and he willingly did it because of my sin. He was the spotless lamb sacrificed for all the polluted filth of my life; I couldn't get clean any other way. He was separated from his Father so he could take on the loads of wrath which my sin deserved. He suffered so there would be no condemnation against me. None!

Jesus served me on the cross by taking my record of sin—all the heinous deeds I would ever commit—and replacing it with the grace gift of his perfect, righteous record so that when God looks at me, he is not disappointed or disgusted but instead says, "This is my beloved daughter with whom I am well pleased, always and forever—not just when she is doing good, and even when she runs from me."

This book is about what that kind of grace looks like for mothers specifically. It's about how Christ gives peace to women laboring under the burden of all those unwritten mom rules. It's about how Christ sets mothers free to love him.

You will find the chapters of this book are sound, but short. To the point, but not heavy—just right for the mom who has been up all night with the baby, the mom who

only has a few minutes waiting for the school bus, and for the mom who relishes her own bathroom breaks as an opportunity to read a couple of pages even if her toddler spends the whole time pounding on the door. This book will not weigh you down with another list of things to do but aims to free you by reminding you of what's already been done for you.

Let this book shout "Gospel!" loud and clear over all the noisy, pushy mom laws. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing you need now in the thick of mothering. In fact, it's the only thing you ever need. The gospel will get you through those long nights of newborns crying and those long days of caring for clingy, feverish toddlers. Take the gospel with you on those car trips back and forth from soccer to piano. Let the gospel guide you when you drop your "baby" off at college and he steps forward into young adulthood. Bask in Christ's love for you and bathe in the outrageous grace you receive day-in and day-out no matter how many times you fail: the gospel will help you find Christ in all that goes on within and around you.

My years with children have seen lots of laughter and tears, illness and sweetness, pleasure and pain, depression and joy. Through the chaos and the trials, God has awakened my heart to the good news that he is not mad at me—there is grace for this sinful mother. God has changed me through his gospel, giving me a new love and a new life, and I hope the same thing will happen to you as you read the good news of his grace and mercy in this book.

Are you looking for Christ in your chaos? As you journey through these pages with me, I pray you will begin to see just how much Christ loves you ... in your chaos, too.

One

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO MOTHERS

Mumbling through my tears, I confessed to my husband that I had decided there was no God. He had walked into our bedroom and found me in the rocking chair in the corner, crying in the dark. I hadn't slept well for months. I felt desperate and broken. When he asked me what was wrong, it all came pouring out.

Our family had been going through some challenging situations which for me had snowballed into dark days and restless nights. It didn't seem like God was answering our prayers or giving any indication he cared. For months I had struggled with doubt, wondering whether God even existed, yet whenever I admitted this to others whom I admired in the church, they told me, "You just have to have faith," and "You must not be reading your Bible and praying enough. Let me help you figure out a plan for a daily quiet time."

Yeah, right. With a 6-year-old, a 4-year-old, a 2-year-old, and a newborn, my house was anything but quiet. I longed for any brief nap or small moment of relief from the

24-hour cycle of nursing, potty training, and homeschooling. I could barely make it from one day to the next. To be told my struggles must come from not reading my Bible enough or praying the right way?! With great restraint, let me just suggest this advice was far from helpful.

Honestly, I had tried to do it right. I had pushed myself to read God's Word when I didn't understand, and I made myself pray when I didn't want to. I sewed dresses, baked bread, sang hymns, volunteered in the nursery, and read all the right books. I didn't need to "try harder;" I truly *couldn't* try harder, and I couldn't take on one more duty. As it turned out, I couldn't even continue to shoulder what I was already carrying, so I broke. If this is what it meant to be a Christian, then I obviously didn't have what it took. Apparently, other people thought they could do it, but I knew I would only disappoint. Not too long afterward, there I was weeping in my rocking chair, devastated to imagine God couldn't be real after all—the Christian life which had been portrayed to me was clearly far too much for anyone to handle.

Sadly, I know I am not the only mother who has felt the oppressive weight of Christian duty as it is so often and so falsely portrayed. Read your Bible, pray, dress this way, speak that way, and all your dreams will come true. God will be happy and so will you. Your kids will be a blessing and never rebel. You will never trip on your walk with God... unless, of course, you neglect your daily quiet times.

For me, and maybe even for you, really devastating things happened after we entered into the family of God. Yes, much in those early days was astonishing and glorious and wonderful. But a few months or years later, depending on your resiliency and your particular church

environment, your shine started to dull and your love began to wane. The newness was no longer new, and most of the amazement and wonder had left the building. What then? If you're like me, you moved right along to the list of Christian duties that more "mature" saints had been pressing you about since that first day.

It's true, isn't it? Shamefully, I confess that after crossing that maturity threshold, I myself helped put younger Christians into prisons of guilt, self-righteousness, and joyless perfectionism. I couldn't see it at the time, but I was really just urging them to come join me in the prison cell where I already lived.

My Initiation into Doing the Right Thing

I can't pinpoint when I was saved. I'm not even sure when I discovered Jesus. But I can tell you exactly when I discovered church, and how I learned to look and smell "like a Christian." So when I think back on my early years as a believer, I can clearly see why I struggled with assurance of my salvation: I had it all backwards. Before my heart was in love with Jesus, I tried to make my feet, hands, and lips do Christian work. I put my faith in my own ability to express faith, not in salvation through the grace God had given me.

When I was 15, I participated in a winter camp with my sister's youth group. Periodically throughout the day, we would break into small groups for study and reflection. As we sat in our circles of eight or so, each of us feeling awkward and wishing we'd move on to the fun stuff, the teacher would often ask about our testimonies. Moving in order around the circle, the answers to the question, "When did you become a Christian?" were consistently

pretty generic—something about winter camp or a summer backpacking trip where a group of friends goes forward together during an altar call. Waiting my turn, I easily formulated my answer in my head: “I have been a Christian since I was born.” I completely believed it. After all, I had always believed in God, and that’s what these people were talking about, right? My turn finally came and I was ready, awkwardness and all. Here we go!

That’s when the group leader skipped me. Skipped right over me to the next person, like I wasn’t there. Only me.

The weekend went on and I sang the songs, prayed when I was supposed to, and started learning about the external behaviors of a “good Christian.” It all seemed easy enough—I didn’t have any interest in drinking or smoking, and the whole boy thing wasn’t happening for me anyway. Walking the “Christian” walk didn’t seem too different from what I already knew.

As the final meeting came to a close, the leader of our group pulled me aside and asked if I wanted to pray with her. My compliant, people-pleasing self agreed. After all, praying is what these people did, and they had given me much practice in the preceding days. As I bowed my head, she asked me to repeat after her. I did exactly that. Words went into my ears in her voice and came out of my mouth in my voice, without ever stopping for even an instant to check in with my mind or heart. When I got to “Amen” she proclaimed me a Christian. This confused me a little because I had thought I was a Christian already, but she apparently understood these mysteries, so I went with it.

That prayer did change things, however. It initiated me into a new club with all new friends—nice kids with somewhat good manners who never made me feel bad

for not wanting to drink, smoke, or have sex. When the leader proclaimed, "Kimm is now a Christian," I received countless hugs and congratulations.

Of course, the next natural step in my "initiation" was baptism. The pressure felt tremendous, and I wanted to comply, but my parents thought I should wait until I was 18 to make sure I was mature enough to make the decision. This was one of the only times I can remember not getting what I requested from my parents, and I was actually glad about it. What self-conscious 15-year-old really wants to get dunked under water and come up sopping wet with her hair plastered to her head in front of the boy she likes?

Even without being baptized, however, I was still accepted in the youth group. Wanting to stay that way, I started learning the rules. I began to have faith in this new way of living which seemed to promise a kind of general happiness. Sundays took on a whole new excitement for me. No more was it just a boring day hanging around the house with my parents—I now had something to do and immediately began attending Sunday school, morning service, evening church, and every single youth group activity. The games were fun, the snacks were great, and, most of all, I belonged. I felt set for life.

My Failing Faith in Doing the Right Thing

Throughout high school, I continued attending retreats and camps, re-dedicating my life to Christ each time; I went to youth conferences and walked forward for each altar call to proclaim I would be a better Christian from then on. All the "good Christians" did these things, and I was the type of kid who only did what I could do well,

so I worked hard at following the pattern set before me. It seemed like you could never be too serious about becoming (and re-becoming) a “good Christian.”

When the age of 18 came, I was dunked. I don’t remember any feelings from that day besides enjoying the extra attention I received. So baptism came and went. Thereafter, my faithfulness during college depended on which boy I was dating and what sport I was playing at the time. Sometimes I mustered up fire for Jesus, and other times I stayed away from Christian activities because I didn’t want to hear that making out with boys or missing church to participate in horseshows was bad. If I didn’t look the part at the moment, I would just stay away. The church had taught me about being a good witness, and that wasn’t my profile, so why would they want an imperfect soul like mine around?

Once I was married and began my journey into motherhood, I began to question my salvation as my faithfulness to God grew burdensome and uninteresting. As a young wife and mother, it seemed truly impossible to continue what I called a “faithful walk with God,” and I began to break down. I couldn’t sleep well. Illness and depression set in. Yet a glimmer of God’s unending mercy shined through, and I saw I had lived far too long in works-based righteousness, putting my faith in my own faithfulness, trying to earn my favor with God. I had depended on my own works and whether people around me accepted me. I had left Jesus behind in my pursuit of being a good Christian.

Not until God stripped away my faith in “doing the right thing” did I begin to see how much effort I had put into living a life according to the law. I couldn’t take the pressure of my own self-righteousness anymore, but the

message from the pulpit and from others in the church always seemed the same: “try harder” to please God. Once I got honest and confessed my practical atheism—the opening scene from this chapter—I dove into a year of darkness during which God stripped away every façade. After that, I could finally marvel at just how much Christ had done for me. I could see the outrageous grace he had given me by sending his Son to earn my salvation. Only when I saw the insufficiency of all the hope I had put in myself could I truly see his faithfulness.

What Do You Make of That?

I've analyzed my salvation story over and over. I've pored over old journals looking for evidence of a change within my heart. But I cannot pinpoint anything and can only trust that God knows when my heart changed. The important thing is that I know *now* my faith does not depend on my own works but rests in the completed work of Jesus Christ who has saved me.

What disturbs me is how much the earlier part of my story resembles the present reality of so many Christians in the Church today. Their assurance of salvation hinges on how they answer the question, “What and how much are you doing for God?” rather than what they confess and believe about the gospel (Romans 10:9). Countless opportunities to go forward and proclaim, “Today, I stop sinning and start acting like a Christian!” will only obscure the gospel and breed a works-based “try harder” and “do better” brand of Christianity. Where the gospel is not the beginning, middle, and end of the salvation message, all you really have is another social club with initiation rites and a code of conduct.

Of course, Christianity *does* have a kind of code, but God did not give his law because he expects us to complete it. He gave it to crush our spirits into understanding that if we are not rescued from our inability to do everything required, we will suffer the wrath of God. He never meant for anyone except Jesus Christ to check off each item on that list, but Jesus did exactly that. He fulfilled the law, once and for all, in order to set us free from it.

I was recently asked how I know God is faithful. Many of us could easily say how God has blessed us with friends and family, a home in a free country, and a Bible in every room. But God's faithfulness is not measured by tangible blessings. It's measured by his character and his promises to us. Yes, things around me obviously signal his goodness to me—I am grateful for my family, my husband's job, and food on the table, but I hope I would still know God is real and faithful even without those things. If we lost our home, if our children became unthinkable rebellious, or if we became sick with cancer, would we still feel so confident in his faithfulness?

So how do I know God is faithful? Because in the year that I denied my faith in Christ, he never let me go. My depression never consumed me, and though I continued to run from God and push him away, nothing moved the Lord away from me. In his kindness, he broke me to the point of near nothingness, and then he showed me his relentless faithfulness.

God was faithful in sending his Son just as the angel had promised Mary (Luke 1:30-33). Jesus, in turn, was faithful in fulfilling the law on our behalf (Matthew 5:17). He is faithful to take our place in God's judgment (1 John 4:10). He is faithful to remain in us through his Spirit (John

14:16-17). If our triune God was faithful to do all of this for us, will he not remain faithful to us today?

What can be so hard to understand in our prideful self-reliance is that God's promise to remain faithful is entirely one-sided. He hasn't told us that if we are good and do all the right things, *then* he will never leave us. No, he has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and affirm that we belong to the Father (Galatians 4:6). His Spirit will never throw up his hands and declare that we are just too difficult to live with and float away in a huff.

Despite all my confusion, doubts, and unbelief, God has reminded me that nothing can separate me from his love. Satan has tried to use my goodness, my commitment to doing the right things, my badness in gross sin, my doubts, and my unbelief to separate me from the love of God, but I have complete confidence that his goal is impossible (Romans 8:35-39).

God's Unfailing Mercy to Moms

Be honest with yourself. Are you delighting in Christ with the same child-like enthusiasm you had the day you started this walk? Or has your skip through the fields of freedom turned into a trudge up the hill of duty? If it has, do you know why? Because you left Jesus behind. We often act as if he was merely our ticket in—the bouncers at the door wanted proof you were with him, but once they let you pass through, you ditched the One who saved your soul and moved on to greater acts of service. Or so you thought.

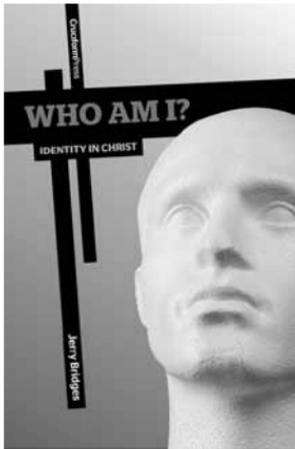
My friend, this is not uncommon. If you have left Jesus in your pursuit of becoming a “good Christian,” then you will struggle in your faith and assurance of salvation. So return to your faith in God's abundant grace, which he

poured out on you through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My life looks much different today than it did that dark morning in the rocking chair. God has rebuilt my faith in his amazing grace for me as a wretched sinner, and I have abandoned my faith in “doing the right thing” because I now understand that my efforts to be a “good Christian” cannot and will not bring me any more favor than I already have with my Father. I also know that my days as a “bad Christian” do not shatter my status as his daughter. My performance as a churchgoer and wife and mother cannot earn or destroy my Father’s affections because Christ has already performed perfectly on my behalf. My Father is just as pleased with me in my darkest hours, wondering if he’s really there, as when I have served him faithfully. My God is an always-faithful, never-changing God for this always-changing mom.

Getting Real

1. Our testimonies can tell us a lot about where we have really put our faith. Write a short summary of your personal testimony to share with others.
2. What do you think makes someone a “good Christian?” Why?
3. What do you find yourself putting your faith in today? Does the hope you have in your parenting, marriage, or ministry override your hope in the finished work of Christ? What does it mean to really “rest” in Christ?
4. What assures you of your salvation? Are you afraid that if your commitment to God waivers, then he will drop his commitment to you? What does 2 Timothy 2:13 tell us about God’s faithfulness?



[Who Am I?](#) Identity in Christ by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

J. I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

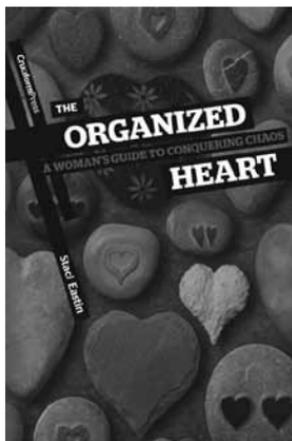
Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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[The Organized Heart](#)

A Woman's Guide to Conquering Chaos

by Staci Eastin

Disorganized?

You don't need more rules, the latest technique, or a new gadget.

This book will show you a different, better way. A way grounded in the grace of God.

"Staci Eastin packs a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. This book is ideal for accountability partners and small groups."

Carolyn McCulley, blogger, filmmaker, author of Radical Womanhood and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

"Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, our techniques will ultimately backfire. Find that dimension here. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this book can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding a new method is not enough."

Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger, author of the forthcoming book, What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done

"Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. The Organized Heart makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to. Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed."

Aileen Challies, mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies

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A Bible Study on Philippians for Women

by Keri Folmar

One of the few truly inductive Bible studies intended for use by women.

“This study points the way into the biblical text, offering a clear and effective guide in studying Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. Keri Folmar encourages her readers first and foremost to listen well to God’s inspired Word.”

***Kathleen Nielson, author of the Living Word Bible Studies;
Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition***

“Keri’s Bible study will not only bring the truths of Philippians to bear upon your life, but will also train you up for better, more effective study of any book of the Bible with her consistent use of the three questions needed in all good Bible study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application.”

Connie Dever, author of The Praise Factory children’s ministry curriculum and wife of Pastor Mark Dever, President of 9 Marks Ministries

“Keri lets the Scriptures do the talking! No cleverly invented stories, ancillary anecdotes, or emotional manipulation here. Keri takes us deeper into the text, deeper into the heart of Paul, deeper into the mind of Christ, and deeper into our own hearts as we pursue Christ for joy in all things. I highly commend this study for your pursuit of joy.”

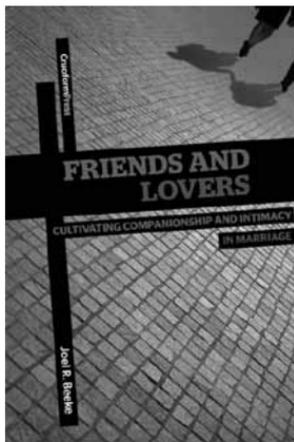
Kristie Anyabwile is a graduate of NC State University and wife of Thabiti, a Gospel Coalition Council Member

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[Friends and Lovers](#)

Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage

by Joel R. Beeke

Marriage is for God's glory and our good.

The secret?

Intimate Christian companionship.

"A book about love, marriage, and sex from Joel Beeke that is surprisingly candid yet without a trace of smuttiness. Fresh and refreshingly straightforward, this is the best book of its kind."

Derek WH Thomas, Visiting Professor, Reformed Theo. Sem.

"Marriage is hard work. And wonderful. And sometimes, it's both at the same time. *Friends and Lovers* is like a personal mentoring session on marriage with a man whose heart is devoted to seeing Christ honored in how we love each other as husbands and wives. It's full of practical wisdom and grace. A delight."

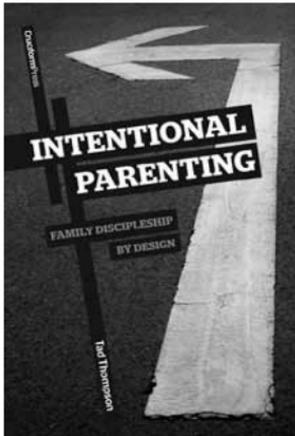
Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today

"By laying the theological, emotional, social, and spiritual foundations of marriage before heading to the bedroom, Joel Beeke provides a healthy corrective to the excessive and obsessive sex-focus of our generation and even of some pastors. But, thankfully, he also goes on to provide wise, practical, down-to-earth direction for couples wanting to discover or recover physical intimacy that will both satisfy themselves and honor God."

Dr. David Murray, Professor, Puritan Reformed Theo. Sem.

"There is no better book than this to renew the affection of happy marriage."

Geoffrey Thomas, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Wales



[Intentional Parenting](#)

Family Discipleship by Design

by Tad Thompson

The Big Picture and a Simple Plan – That’s What You Need to Do Family Discipleship Well

This book will allow you to take all the sermons, teachings, and exhortations you have received on the topic of family discipleship, make sense of it,

“As parents, we know God has given us the responsibility to train our children in his ways. But many parents don’t know where or how to start. Tad has done us all a favor by identifying seven key categories of biblical teaching we can utilize in teaching our children godly truth and principles. This easy-to-follow plan will help any parent put the truth of God’s Word into their children’s hearts.”

***Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board,
Southern Baptist Convention; father of six***

“Here is a practical page-turner that encourages fathers to engage the hearts of their families with truth and grace. In an age when truth is either ignored or despised, it is refreshing to see a book written for ordinary fathers who want their families to be sanctified by the truth. Thompson writes with a grace which reminds us that parenting flows from the sweet mercies of Christ.”

***Joel Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological
Seminary***

“Need an introductory text to the topic of discipling children? Here is a clear, simple book on family discipleship, centered on the gospel rather than human successes or external behaviors.”

***James M. Hamilton, Associate Professor of Biblical
Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***

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[Brass Heavens](#)

Reasons for Unanswered Prayer

by Paul Tautges

Does it ever seem like God is not listening?

Scripture offers six clear reasons why your prayers may go unanswered.

Learn what they are and what you can do about it.

“Paul Tautges scatters the darkness of doubt. He blends biblical teaching with practical illustrations to challenge and comfort us when the heavens seem as brass. Read this to revive your prayers, to melt the heavens, and to increase your answers.”

David Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Some things in the Scriptures are conveniently ignored...but this book will not let us continue to bury Scripture’s clear teaching, or continue to ignore the ongoing rebellions, unrelinquished resentments, and unconfessed sins in our lives that may be hindering our prayers.”

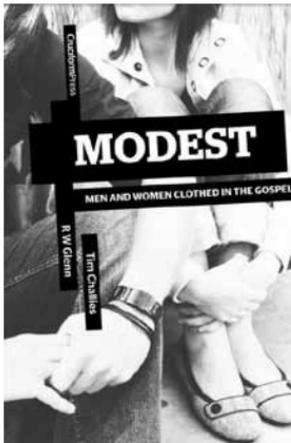
Nancy Guthrie, author, Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament

“Both motivating and convicting...Read and obey for the sake of your future, your family, and the work of God in the world.”

Jim Elliff, President, Christian Communicators Worldwide

“Like the Scriptures, Paul Tautges does not leave us in the pit of despair, but shows that where sin abounds, grace superabounds—there are biblical pathways for dealing with our role in unanswered prayers and for responding humbly to God’s affectionate sovereignty.”

Bob Kellemen, Executive Dir., Biblical Counseling Coalition



[Modest](#)

Men and Women Clothed in the Gospel

by R W Glenn, Tim Challies

Modesty is about freedom, not rules.

What you say or do or wear is not really the point. The point is your heart.

True modesty flows from a solid grasp of the gospel.

“It is so refreshing to have a book on modesty that is a useful resource and not a legalistic, culture-bound list that leaves you a bit paranoid and guilty. No, this book is different. Its counsel on modesty is not rooted in rules, but in the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That grace alone is able to get at the heart of the problem of modesty, which is the heart. In a culture where immodesty is the accepted norm, Glenn and Challies have given us help that every Christian desperately needs.”

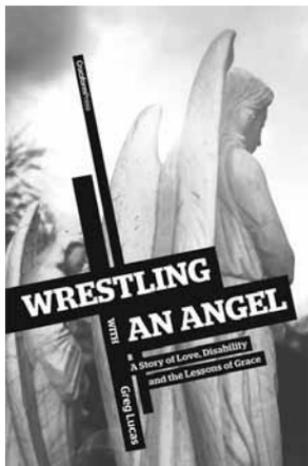
Paul Tripp, pastor, conference speaker, and author

“How short is too short? How tight is too tight? Glenn and Challies don’t say. But they do provide a thoughtful framework to help us come to a grace-based, gospel-grounded understanding of modesty that extends beyond mere clothing. They uphold a vision for modesty that’s both beautiful and desirable – and not only for gals, but for guys too! This book is a great tool to help you wrestle with the practical question of what and what not to wear.”

Mary A. Kassian, Author, Girls Gone Wise

“The authors of Modest break new ground in their treatment of this difficult subject. It is a healthy antidote to the prevailing views, which tend toward either legalism or antinomianism, by grounding the whole subject in the gospel. I heartily recommend this book.”

Jerry Bridges, Author, The Pursuit of Holiness



[Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability
and the Lessons of Grace

by Greg Lucas

The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called “a touchstone book of my life,” and “alternately hilarious and heartbreaking,” a book that “turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before.”

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’ – and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper