

{ W H Y }
M O T H E R H O O D
M A T T E R S

September McCarthy



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*For every woman...
born with a mother's heart
to be birthed in God's will and God's time.*

*For my daughters and my sons' wives,
my granddaughters, and the next generation,
this book is for your future.
It is my earnest prayer and abundant hope you will
embrace motherhood and everything it will offer you.*

*To my builder. My rock and protector of my heart.
We did this together.*





Invitation

{WHY} Every Woman Has a Mother's Heart

I feel as if I know you.

I have talked to you in the line at the grocery store. I have watched you sit alone at the park while your children play, and I have heard your story on the soccer sidelines. You and me? We have passed in the grocery line, with babies tied to our hips and teenagers asking for the keys to drive home. Your heart was knit with mine as we rocked on my front porch and cried tears of solidarity. You might be the woman I noticed mentoring teens at the local youth event, or the grandmother treating her grandson to lunch and listening ever so patiently. I see you. I hear you and I get it. Motherhood, in every season, is hard—and I do not believe we should do this alone.

We are coming together here, wondering the very same thing. *Will any of this ever make a difference?* There are days I have questioned if this thing called motherhood really matters. *Am I doing this right?* There must be more to the everyday, more behind the feelings of insecurity, and more answers than questions.

The repetitive work of everyday investment seems more like servanthood than an accumulation of earnings or rewards for the commitment and diligence. The truth is that most anything worth investing in will require us to become low in order to rise up. And when I rise up in my efforts in motherhood, I want them to mean something. To matter. To not just be an offering, but a sacrifice. That is what we do with gifts. We use them. We treasure them. And we give them over to God.

Motherhood is a gift that flows both ways. We do the giving and

might wait years to feel we are receiving. We could possibly be missing the gift in the giving; and while we wait for the feeling of return on our investment, we are losing the moments that matter. I have watched woman after woman carry a beautiful dream in her heart, and then become embittered when the dream let her down and didn't meet her greatest expectations. On the outside, it may have looked as if she had everything any woman could want, but on the inside, the crushing reality that her dreams would never be realized turned her vision into one big disappointment.

I have heard it all.

This is what it all boils down to: Motherhood may disappoint you if you are unsure of your purpose.

I have lived inside those pockets of disappointment, discontentment. I have watched dreams pass me by. I have walked through womanhood wondering when I would feel that fulfillment everyone talks about.

Even after I became a mother, I wondered why motherhood mattered so much. Perhaps this is you and you get this. You feel the rawness that tugs at every woman's heart when she doesn't know the why.

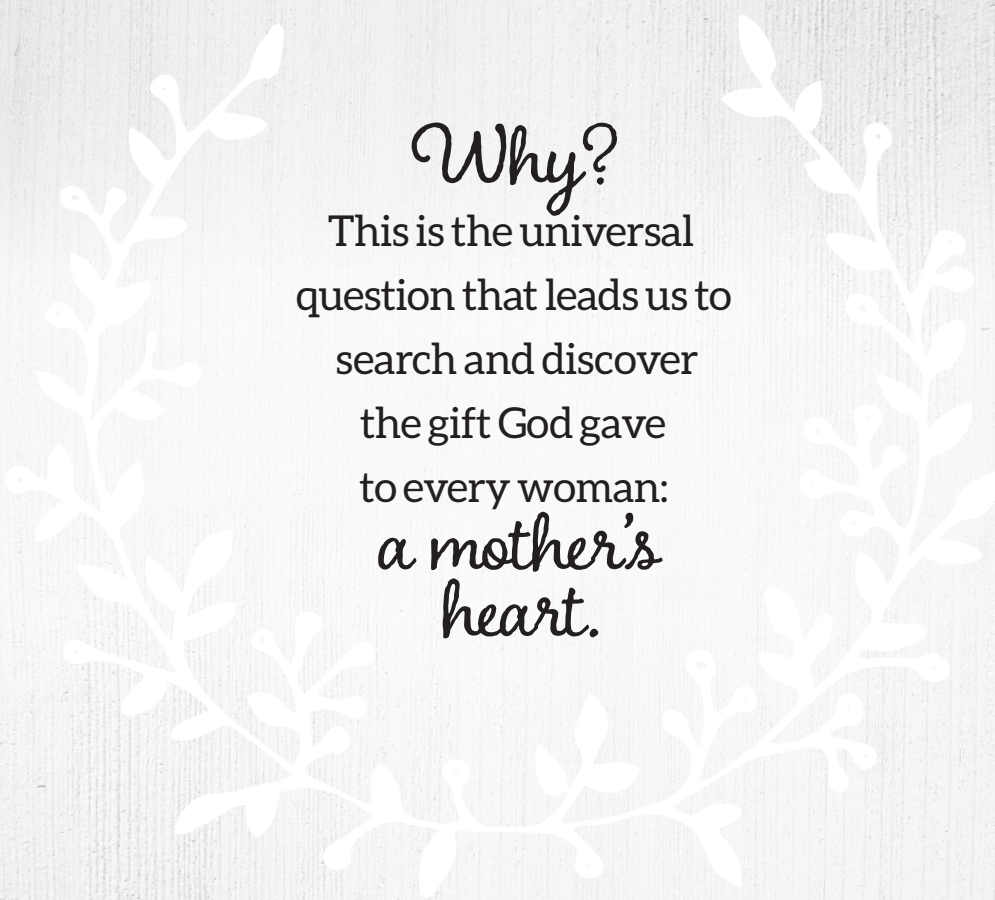
Women with children talk about the early days of motherhood and their lack of purpose in the moments of sleep deprivation and diaper changes.

Women who are single or childless grieve the loss of their close-to-heart dreams.

Women with an untimed pregnancy spend years grieving the loss of time, plans, and desires to dream bigger.

And the women watching all of us, as we stir the pot of disappointment together, ask themselves, "Why would I ever begin to birth a dream or be brave enough to think that motherhood mattered?"

Why? This is the universal question that leads us to search and discover the gift God gave to every woman: a mother's heart. It's what we do with it that matters.



Why?

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God's Why Holds Purpose

My marriage's beginnings were marked with repeated pregnancy loss, which left me wondering all the more why motherhood mattered. The emptiness of my womb sent me searching in deep places to find the answers in my own story and the bigger picture ahead.

How could I invest so much love and care and not see the fruit? Would there ever be a day when I knew it was all going to be okay? Why was I doing all of this anyway?

And then God gave me the *why*.

With my story, there is surrender in loss. It is a story woven into the very fiber of my womb and delivered to the hands of a loving God. I discovered that every moment matters to God. Even moments of despair brought me hope. And hope gave me the ability to lay my motherhood on the altar of surrender.

Surrendering our desires and our hearts to His will allows God to turn those seeds of trust into the fruit of His plan. He begins to grow our minds toward motherhood. When I surrendered my ideals, God grew a new and amazing desire and planted it within me. Full of passion and fervor, I discovered a love for what I was being called to and an understanding that every woman is given a mother's heart. We are asked to surrender ideals and embrace this high calling.

Women, we are called to be sowers.

Sowers. It sounds so mundane, doesn't it? Planting seeds, bending low, tilling the ground, sifting the dirt, pruning, watering, and weeding. It takes time and hard work to plant and reap a harvest. We need one another if we are to remember to continue to work with an end in sight, even when life seems fruitless or desperate. The heart and understanding we take into womanhood will affect our vision, our purpose, and our outcome. We don't need to suffer through God's calling on our lives.

Read that again. Motherhood is not a call to suffer through.

Motherhood matters because *you* matter. Your struggles matter, your questions matter, and your dreams matter. Embracing motherhood doesn't require you to give up the passions God has given to you. Motherhood does not destine us for drudgery and loneliness.

It is my prayer that you will find hope and help as we walk together through many motherhood matters. And that you will discover that *you* matter. Every woman has a mother's heart. A beautiful place from which we give, nurture, mentor, love, and dream. Let's grow those places together as we invest in others the gifts God has given us.

I wrote this book with every woman in mind. I sweep spilled Cheerios up off my floor, wipe runny noses, teach my children world geography, scrub toilets, change sheets, talk to my teens until wee hours of the night, manage sports and academia, and mentor my family every day, all day. Here you will find a thousand glorious mistakes and a thousand hallelujahs thanking the Lord that His mercies are new every morning. I don't hide the daily cracks and cries of my motherhood, because when we are broken together, we are in *communion* together. Poured out.

We have a divine purpose and the plan has already been laid out for us. Every word, action, decision, and every training moment is a part of that plan. Everything has a why. Even motherhood. It has not been lost on our feelings of inadequacy, fears of failure, or drudgeries in the mundane.

Go easy on yourself, mama. God has the big picture. And let me tell you, it is a mighty beautiful thing to behold!

Part I

{WHY} You Are Not Alone

*Love is heroic when compelled to be, the rest of the time
it is quiet and unrewarded, every hour on the hour.*

JOHN D. BLASE





{WHY}

Everyone Else Is Having a Baby and I'm Not

Motherhood was never a dream of mine.

I didn't play with baby dolls or talk about love and marriage, and I never once thought about having a baby of my own. I was the smiling, friendly girl in school who awkwardly dressed like the teacher and created seasonal bulletin boards for my bedroom walls. I listened to eighties music, learned and practiced all the current dance moves, lived on my roller skates, and sold Girl Scout cookies. I just never dreamed about motherhood.

That is, until the day I met my builder.

When we married during college, our thoughts turned toward the future. Our future. Did we want a family right away? We soon discovered that God had a bigger plan. Too many times my womb washed away any new hope I had of becoming a mother. Repeated miscarriages brought reality quickly into focus: There are no guarantees. The day we heard the first faint heartbeat, our hope, once invested in what was lost, seemed to come into focus and settle on something new. Life.

I Was Going to Be a Mother

We were counting the weeks to our long-awaited ultrasound appointment and confirming the new life growing inside me. The waiting room had limited seating that day. I was guessing the woman to my left was as far along in her pregnancy as myself, give or take a few weeks, and the woman to my right must've been there for a different women's health issue. She didn't pick up the assorted pregnancy and

baby magazines stacked on the table in front of us, and she avoided the waiting-room chatter among the women about their due dates. I sat between these women awkwardly, as still as possible, a habit born of necessity, because any drastic movement threatened to heave my insides out and make my head spin until I passed out. Salted crackers and sips of water hadn't cut the nausea, and broken blood vessels around my eyes displayed evidence of my rounds of severe vomiting.

No one ever told me that motherhood would look like this.

It was in the middle of one of those fainting spells when our phone rang. "The doctor has a few concerns." Without further explanation or any assurances, the assistant requested that I return for an ultrasound.

So there I was. Called back to the exam room but feeling just as awkward and uncomfortable as I had in the waiting room, and even more isolated in my own skin because of the curt bedside manner and the sterile physical surroundings common in those days. The cool gel they applied to my stomach sent our little girl into a somersault. I watched in wonder as her petite features appeared on the screen and the sound of her beating heart filled the room. I could count the beats; they seemed in sync with my own. Her heart matched my own rhythm—steady, strong, and full of life. Seeing and hearing the big picture was enough to give me the courage to wait for the doctor's report.

I had grown to love this little babe that I had already carried for 20 weeks strong. It took a few months for me to relinquish the fear that this pregnancy might also end in a miscarriage; but her body was growing into mine, and I knew she was going to be the first little girl we would hold in our arms.

The doctor asked me to "clean up" and meet him in his office when I was ready. *What did that even mean?* I was a shaking, emotional mess in that room all by myself. As I sat on the chair in the corner and slowly redressed, I thought about how the next five minutes might go. The techs are trained to not convey any emotion or indicate whether something might be wrong. It took every ounce of my willpower to turn the handle on the changing-room door and step into the hallway leading to the doctor's consultation office.

Motherhood never felt so lonely.

Our doctor was in his last year before retirement. During his practice, he had likely been through this numerous times before. Yet I sensed hesitancy in his movement and noticed a hint of sadness in his eyes. The irony of the human heart played around in my mind. Here I was feeling sorry for this man who was preparing to deliver the most difficult news to me about my baby.

My concern for him disappeared when he not-so-gently handed me the death sentence for our baby in the form of a note to return to the office once we had made a decision. Basically, he gave us the choice to terminate the life of our growing baby or give birth to our little girl who had no kidneys.

I will always remember this as the first moment I ever questioned why.

The waiting room felt a lot different to me on the way out that day. I walked straight through a sea of happy, pregnant women with hearts full of hope, anticipating answers like, "It's a girl," and I headed home with more questions than answers. Right at the top of my list was the question why.

Nothing in the following few days made sense to me. I felt as if someone had pulled my heart straight out of my chest, and I saw the world through a veil of bitterness and confusion. The universe continued with joy and celebration while the builder and I felt as if we had to say good-bye once again to our dream of having a baby.

Why would God ask me to bury a dream again? Doesn't God want the best for us? I wallowed in the whys. I grieved over the whys. My baby continued to grow and to move, and I carried my dream close to my heart every day.

My body grew into motherhood, just like any other expectant mama—except, I was going to say good-bye and not get to mother her at all. How was I to let go of something I wanted while it continued to grow inside of me?

And then, one day, the builder and I were introduced to a couple who had experienced similar loss, and our lives were forever changed. We cried over our baby girl that day as they held us tight and prayed and so gently shared their wisdom with us. "Let God use this. Let

Him have your baby girl and let others see what He can do with broken dreams.”

Maybe I wasn't meant to be a mother, I thought. Maybe I couldn't be the mother God would want me to be. When we despair against God's ultimate plan, we lose moments of blessing that could be ours—and more importantly His—while we grieve. Grief should not close our eyes to the work God is doing in and around us. Slowly and surely, God was opening my eyes to the possibilities.



Why would God ask me to bury a dream again? Doesn't God want the best for us?

For the last five months of my pregnancy I carried my little one with every ounce of love I had, knowing this would be our only time on earth together. If God was going to give me a gift, I wasn't going to complain it wasn't the gift I wanted.

I sang her to sleep and read her my favorite books. I went for walks and stayed up all night with her as she kicked and let me know that this was our nighttime together alone. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. She knew my heart from inside my womb, and she knew my voice—as she still does in heaven.

God gave me a heart for motherhood because He had so much more ahead for me to love.

Motherhood Captured Me at the Release

Twenty-eight hours of bearing down and finding strength from places within I never knew existed. It was the first life-giving sacrifice I have ever given. The burning, back-breaking pain of moving a breech baby down the birth canal and into the world forever etched a physical memory on my body. Manipulating with precise and skilled hands, our doctor reached for our baby's horizontal arms and moved them inside my womb to bring her bottom side out, painfully tearing the very part of me that I thought made me a mother. Pain control was not available, and the builder told me that my eyes pleaded mercy while his prayers begged for it to end.

The final declaration of my limited strength was my last pleading

cry before my full-term beautiful baby girl was set on my chest. There she was, so perfectly beautiful. Her shallow breathing contrasted my own as my body exhaled the end of the struggle. Relief and relinquish was the call now. Her paper-thin fingernails, deep brown eyes, and curly, soft wisps of hair are forever etched on my heart. Her scent of heaven, the softness of her skin on mine, and her quietness are my very first memories of motherhood.

Capture and release.

As the physical struggle lessened, the emotional pull was gaining momentum. We knew that our firstborn was in a fight for her life. Her breaths were quiet, but her eyes spoke volumes. It was the most precious hello and the hardest good-bye.

The supernatural strength a mother has when she is captured by His grace overwhelms the release to come.

Watching your child take her last breath, while you hold her to your breast, leaves you empty on the inside for a very long time. The hands on the clock do not seem in sync with the years. Suddenly you realize that you may be losing time in the lost moments, rather than gaining gifts, as they pass you by.

Releasing Pain to Hold on to Beauty

Motherhood rushes past many of us and leaves us wondering if there is more. So much release and so little time to capture. The beauty of a woman usually has deep roots formed by the release. The struggle brings her to a place of confidence in her calling, but it is etched on her heart. The places that once held the hurt and the ache are now filled with mercy and grace. If we choose to let the moments make us and not break us, motherhood leaves an imprint of beauty, even when brokenness formed us.

A woman with empty arms is even more capable of grasping that which God brings her way to behold. We will walk through deep valleys and stand high on mountaintops. But without walking through the long, deep places of release, our view from up high would never be the same.

God reaches into the deep places of our lives and shines His

purpose. Right down from heaven, He sends hope for the hurting mamas who tell Him, “I just don’t want to do this anymore.” It is okay to give up the fight and embrace the calling.



Motherhood leaves an imprint of beauty, even when brokenness formed us.

Waiting Expectantly for God’s Go

The day we buried our beautiful brown-eyed, brown-haired little girl, was the day God showed me His dreams never die.

In our times of loss, we are called to wait expectantly on God. Grace and hope enable our 180-degree turnaround in the moments when we feel that enough is enough. Enough brokenness. Enough surrender. Enough of nothing to hold on to. The point of no return is where everything can be turned around.

When our motherhood is calling us to leave something behind or say good-bye to dreams in our hearts, we are not giving something up. We are giving something over and waiting on the Lord to return an investment from our sacrifice. Often we consider the turn in the road to be an obstacle.



Truth to Live By

The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.
(Psalm 28:7 NIV)

God does not place obstacles along our way to His plan. We might view waiting as a roadblock rather than the slow walk to the green light He already has purposed. Motherhood may feel like a sprint, but it is a slow, careful run to the biggest victory plan ever. Roadblocks and defeat will surely come, but He wants us to come forth as gold.

Taking the Steps

You may be the woman who is waiting for God to answer your prayers for motherhood and the wait is wearing you thin. Maybe you are up to your elbows in mothering and you are wondering if you are ever going to see the other side of the dream. The wall between you and your desires has taken on the banner of maternal desperation.

Take a step back from your circumstances long enough to see the beginning, and remember that the end is in God's hands. Look beyond the emotion and the sacrifice to feel something new in your bones. Follow the unfamiliar tug at your heart to leave the grief and the weary ache behind. That will require true sacrifice, as will answering the call to pick up where you left off with a renewed sense of commitment and appeal.

Do not be discouraged by the release of your dreams. God wants to first capture your heart, and His firm grip will hold you tightly enough to bring all those pieces together.

Motherhood captures us with a grip of commitment—with the call to be willing to release. Do not lose heart or let go too soon. The waiting is the mystery. The giving is the gift.

My Parenting Principle

Motherhood is never a guarantee, but a woman who waits with an expectant heart will always reap a blessing. As I wait upon the Lord in my motherhood, I release my will to His and do my best to capture the moments He has for me as His plan unfolds. In every moment I give back to the Lord, my motherhood is being perfected so I can finish this race. God will not bury my dreams, and He will allow beauty to grow out of the ashes.



Abba Father, I am leaning into You as I feel the weight of these words and the brokenness in my spirit. My arms feel empty and I ache for the dreams that are not birthed yet. I bring my own heart and the hearts of my friends who walk through dark valleys and struggle with the release. Fill me with Your presence, Lord. I seek Your face and Your peace, as I wait in deep surrender. You captured my heart, and I am releasing my plan to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

