

BROOKE McGLOTHLIN

*Gospel
Centered
Mom*

THE FREEING TRUTH ABOUT
WHAT YOUR KIDS REALLY NEED

Praise for
Gospel-Centered Mom

“Brooke McGlothlin doesn’t gloss over the hard truths of motherhood or provide quick fixes for our parenting failures. Instead she offers something much more meaningful. Brooke walks us *right through the hard truths* of motherhood so that we will more deeply treasure the beautiful truth of the Gospel and, as a result, be transformed into Gospel-centered moms.”

—JEANNIE CUNNION, author of *Mom Set Free*

“*Gospel-Centered Mom* is a must-read for every Christian mom who constantly doubts that she is succeeding at motherhood. Brooke cuts right to the heart of what most moms wrestle with day-to-day, and she invites readers in like old friends engaging in an honest conversation with a cup of coffee in one hand and a Bible in the other. This book is chock full of applicable Bible verses and heartfelt stories that meet moms right where they are and gracefully unpacks both the hard truths and beautiful truths that moms need to accept and embrace. This book eased my mama heart, encouraged me to be a stronger advocate for my children, and taught me practical ways to keep God at the center of my parenting and daily life.”

—ASHLEY WILLIS, coauthor of *7 Days to a Stronger Marriage*

“I’ve watched this message beautifully played out in Brooke’s life long before she wrote these words on the page. She isn’t saying these things because they are popular; she is saying them because they are true. Brooke is the perfect person to remind us that being a Gospel-centered mom drives us every day to our true source of

strength: Jesus. I believe this book will bring a message of freedom and hope to moms everywhere.”

—STACEY THACKER, author of *Fresh Out of Amazing*

“Brooke’s warmth and authenticity draw you into each story she shares. Through her honesty you connect with her. Her struggles are your struggles. But she’s not throwing a pity party about the trials of motherhood. In *Gospel-Centered Mom*, Brooke challenges her readers to embrace their insufficiencies and accept Jesus’s enough-ness. She argues against striving and offers rest in Him. Motherhood isn’t for wimps. Brooke’s book is a dare—a dare to keep the Gospel at the center instead of our kids or ourselves.”

—RACHAEL CARMAN, homeschool mother of seven,
RachaelCarman.com

“As moms we often look at the lives of our children and wonder, *Are we doing this thing called motherhood right?* In *Gospel-Centered Mom*, Brooke McGlothlin, using the truth of God’s Word, reconfigures the definition of who and what we are to be. When we direct our energy and focus on Christ first, our roles as mothers flow from that place of fullness—a redirection we all need.”

—LYNN COWELL, Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker and author
of *Brave Beauty*

“This book is like a compass for moms, offering practical direction as we journey forward in faith, trusting and living from the truth of God’s Word, not getting lost in our fading feelings, passing circumstances, or moments of struggle. With vulnerable stories, Brooke echoed my fears and feelings of inadequacy in motherhood and pointed my heart back to the fundamental truth

that I will indeed never be adequate, but God always is—and He is with me.”

—FRANCIE WINSLOW, author and speaker

“Mothering is not a spectator sport. It’s messy, filled with stories of failure and loss, faith and hope, mistakes and triumphs. Brooke McGlothlin’s *Gospel-Centered Mom* is a revelation for every woman who’s convinced she’s not enough for the job. We will never be smart enough, godly enough, or patient enough—because we’re not meant to be. Our lack reveals our need, and Brooke writes honestly about the hard and beautiful truths of motherhood. She gives practical teaching and conveys deep theological concepts in an easy-to-comprehend manner. If the calling of motherhood has left you feeling empty, this beautiful book is guaranteed to fill you up and give you hope.”

—KATE BATTISTELLI, author of *Growing Great Kids* and mother of Grammy award-winning artist Francesca Battistelli

“Motherhood has been so much harder than I ever imagined. Reading Brooke’s words helped me realize I’m not the only one to feel that way. Her message of moving past me and always toward Jesus and His Good News is exactly what I need as I navigate life as a mom. I’m grateful for the truth I was reminded of in *Gospel-Centered Mom*: the hope of the Gospel is enough for me, for my children, for all of us.”

—ERIN MOHRING, cofounder of the MOB Society and Raising Boys Ministries and writer at HomeWithTheBoys.net

“Brooke’s honest, transparent approach to Gospel-centered parenting is incredibly refreshing. Moms need to hear the truth even

when it hurts, and Brooke is the perfect person to deliver it as she shares humbly from her own experience raising hard-to-handle boys. I am grateful for Brooke's obedience in sharing what we need to hear over what we want to hear. After reading *Gospel-Centered Mom*, I feel like I just finished a much-needed coffee date with a precious friend."

—MONICA SWANSON, author and writer at MonicaSwanson.com

"If you're looking for answers about how to be a perfect parent, this book is not the one you're looking for. But if you want to know more about how God uses parenting to do the deep soul-level work of changing you, *Gospel-Centered Mom* can help. Giving keen attention to what's happening inside us as mothers, Brooke unfolds God's greater plan to parent us in the midst of our parenting. Down to earth and practical, this book will help you connect Sunday truth to the rest of your busy, busy week."

—HANNAH ANDERSON, author of *Humble Roots*

"I feel like Brooke McGlothlin is a kindred spirit I have yet to meet. She's been doing for mothers of boys through the MOB Society what I've been seeking to do for mothers of girls through Secret Keeper Girl. You'll find a dozen ways that this book re-anchors your parenting to God's Word. She brings the practical theology of the Scriptures alive!"

—DANNAH GRESH, best-selling author and creator of Secret Keeper Girl

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BROOKE MCGLOTHLIN

FOREWORD BY KAREN EHMAN

*Gospel-
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GOSPEL-CENTERED MOM

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To my two amazing boys. I asked for you and God provided. You're my greatest gift and my greatest challenge, both because of who you are and because nothing else on earth brings me to my knees with more regularity. God uses you to show me my great need for Him, and for that, I'm eternally grateful. There's nothing you could ever do that would make me not love you.

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Foreword

I remember that day a quarter century ago as if it happened last Tuesday. We brought our green-eyed, auburn-haired baby girl home from the hospital. We were met by our front-yard lilac bush bursting bright with delicate lavender blooms, its sweetness wafting through the air, although it had been still green just five days earlier when I'd gone into labor. After a rocky start that included an emergency C-section, I thought the roughest part of my mothering was behind me. Now I imagined I would head home and apply all of the knowledge I had gained from the countless baby books and magazines I'd devoured during the months prior. When I did, I felt confident that this raising-children gig would be both fun and fulfilling.

I wasn't foolish enough to believe I'd be a perfect mom. I knew that perfection was not attainable. However, my goal was to be a really great mom who followed God and parented by the Bible. I surmised that a combination of advice from the experts, my all-out efforts, and the best promise-packed verses of Scripture would ensure that I experienced only occasional bumps on the parenting road. My children would turn out wonderful. It seemed like a simple formula to me.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I'd bitten off more than I could chew. Although I felt I was keeping up my end of the bargain and behaving just as all the experts said I should, my darling daughter obviously did not get the memo. And neither did

the two bouncing baby brothers that followed shortly after her. Pretty soon I was a frenzied mess of a mom. My kids sometimes disobeyed. They made a shambles out of my formerly neat house. They fought with one another and argued with me. Sure, they also brought much joy to my heart. However, more often than not, I found myself desperately wondering what in me ever thought it was a good idea to have these kids in the first place. Why wasn't my intense desire to be a good mom and my acquired parenting knowledge enough—especially when I hitched a few Bible verses to the whole biblical blueprint? But it wasn't enough. It was just not working.

At. All.

As a result, I often felt less-than. Panicked. Even somewhat depressed.

More than two decades of parenting has taught me that these feelings of desperation were the exact places where God wanted to meet me—and my kids. Once I let go of the craving to be a stellar parent by my own efforts, I realized that I will never be enough. But Jesus is. He is more than enough. And He is longing to meet me smack-dab in the middle of my not-enough-ness. This glorious truth keeps me running to Him—both when I fail and on those rare occasions when I actually get it right.

My not being enough is also crucial for my children. You see, if I were a flawless parent, my children would have no need for God. What a horrible thought! It hadn't occurred to me that my faults and flaws, my quirks and those huge holes in my parenting, would be the exact things that could point my children to Christ. But they have been. Over and over and over again.

We moms need to purpose to stop trying so hard and instead begin to live a Gospel-glazed life, seeing our weaknesses as the avenues for Jesus to show Himself strong, to us and to our kids. To look to Him to be the great gap-filler and the only One who can love us all with perfection.

May this book you now hold in your hands be a tool that God uses to meet you in your own state of not-enough-ness. It is there that the light of the Gospel blooms brightest, sending the sweetness of Jesus's sacrificial love wafting through your hearts and your home, drawing all to Himself, the perfect Savior.

He is more than enough. Let this be the beginning of your quest to let Him live and love through you.

Your fellow not-enough mom,
—Karen Ehman
New York Times best-selling
author of *Listen, Love, Repeat*

When Trying Harder Isn't Enough

I sat at her kitchen table, my son on my left and math books on my right. Long division was sucking the life right out of our home, so I'd sought help from another mom.

Back in my youth I'd been a math girl. My brain just understood it. The only times I struggled were when I had teachers whose teaching style didn't match my learning style. When that happened, I would happily ask my favorite math teacher ever—Mr. Biggs—if he'd meet with me after school for a few minutes and help me grasp the troublesome concept. Mr. Biggs spoke math in a way my brain and heart could understand, switching on a light bulb when uninspired teaching had turned it off.

I often find myself wanting to be Mr. Biggs to my children, not just educationally, but in the larger lessons of life. I want to be their favorite teacher, the one who inspires them to love learning and helps them overcome when others can't. Unfortunately, I've found that my dreams are strikingly different from the reality in our home.

The math girl who took joy and pride in her ability to understand difficult equations, proofs, and systems had been unable to teach her son long division. He knew all the various parts and

pieces and could do them with ease, but putting them together? That was a different story.

I had tried everything I knew to help him succeed, but finally I had to admit that *I* couldn't understand why *he* couldn't understand. It seemed so simple to me, and I just couldn't come up with another way to reach him. I felt like a failure.

So as I sat listening to my neighbor tutor my son in the art of long division, my heart was full of anxiety, hope, feelings of failure, and excitement for my son—all at the same time.

My neighbor Jessica is one of those born teachers. She's truly gifted with an amazing, natural, God-given ability to get kids to do what she asks. She loves teaching, and students who need a little extra help energize her heart and brain. She comes up with fun, creative ways to teach difficult concepts, and her students love her for it.

She sat down with my son that night, and in thirty minutes she had him doing long division. Her method was systematic, thorough, and cute, and the whole time she taught him I experienced relief and joy for him—mixed with a generous helping of defeat for me. Why was this so easy for her? Why couldn't I have figured out how to teach him that way? Why did he respond so much better to her than to me?

And then somewhere among divide, multiply, subtract, repeat, I made a startling observation.

Jessica's house was eerily quiet.

At seven thirty at night, with two children under the age of twelve, a husband, and a large dog all under the same roof, her

house was quiet. Crickets. No fussing, no interruptions, no screaming, wrestling, or barking. Nothing but the sound of our voices as we sat around her kitchen table.

I feel the need to repeat that it was seven thirty. Right after dinner. Right before bedtime.

In my home, filled bellies mean explosive energy levels. Like shaken pop bottles, my nine- and eleven-year-old boys bubble over with energy and somehow seem incapable of making good decisions. Every character quality we've worked on during the day goes right out the window, abandoned to the need for speed.

The after-dinner hour is by far one of the most demanding parenting times for me. By the end of the day, I'm usually fried and longing for a few minutes to sit down and relax, and because of that, I don't always do a good job of corralling my kids. A lot of nights we just survive until bedtime (which launches a whole other level of crazy). No, *quiet* is definitely not the word I would use to describe my house at seven thirty at night.

I listened to the sounds of Jessica's home for a few more minutes to give someone time to explode or break something, but it never happened. So as my son worked through one of the problems, I asked Jessica, "Is your house *always* this quiet?"

She smiled, thought for a moment, and said, "Yes, it usually is."

Stunned, I looked at her and said, "What magic do you have, and how can I get some? My house is *never* this quiet!"

She laughed in a way that made her eyes light up and replied, "Well, I just run a really tight ship."

My head and heart exploded.

Jessica looked back down at the math problem, blissfully unaware of the bomb that had just gone off inside me, accompanied by the shrieking of my inner critic:

See? If you could just get your act together and run a tighter ship, your home would be more peaceful too. Your husband has a chaotic, stressful, dangerous job, and you can't even provide him with a safe, quiet place to retreat. If you would just use your brain, try harder, and be more consistent, you might be able to control your kids, not to mention teach them long division.

Jessica has it all together. Her house is clean, her children are well behaved, and they're not running around like crazy people after dinner. She's organized, creative, disciplined, and always knows what's going on in the lives of her friends and family. She arrives on time and is always prepared. She doesn't forget birthdays or fail to sign her kids up for sports. She does it all well, and you can't manage any of it in a halfway decent way.

You're a failure. Useless. There's something wrong with you. You don't have what it takes to be a good mom. You're not enough.

In a matter of thirty seconds or less, the feelings of worthlessness I've struggled with all my life came rushing back and threatened to pull me under. Inwardly gasping and clawing for air, I asked my son to pack up his things, excused us, thanked Jessica for her help, and rushed next door to the safety of my home.

NOT ENOUGH

As a mom I struggle all the time with feeling like a failure. When my own mom read the first chapter of this book, she looked at me

and said, “Brooke, what did we do to make you feel like the scum of the earth?” I laughed, looked at my boys, and said, “Mom, it wasn’t you. It was *them*.” Sure, certain experiences here and there throughout my life pushed me toward self-doubt, toward feeling like I don’t have what it takes, but by and large motherhood is what sent me right over the edge into full-blown insecurity.

Why does it bother me so much to feel inept at mothering my boys? Maybe because it’s the thing I want most to get right.

I’m guessing that at some point in your motherhood career you too have felt not enough. You’ve looked at your children, your home, your job, your friendships, your ministries, and noticed that your current reality falls sadly short of the way you want things to be. If you’re like me—and I suspect you are—you’ve wrestled so long with feeling you can’t keep everything together and you don’t have what it takes to meet your children’s deepest needs and you aren’t enough for the job that this negative perspective has become a way of life, a pair of glasses through which you see and interpret everything around you.

“Not Enough” is stamped across everything you put your hands to. Date night? Who has time for that? A sparkling home? You’re lucky to get the laundry put away. On time? How about perpetually five minutes late? Meal planning? You’ve got to be kidding. Most nights you’re just trying to survive until bedtime. Verses in the Bible that talk about the victorious Christian life, joy in all circumstances (even motherhood?), overcoming in the name of Jesus, and the power of prayer just make you scratch your head and think, *Maybe that doesn’t apply to me*. If so, you’re not alone.

I have talked to countless women who feel that they're failing or that they're not strong enough, creative enough, spiritual enough, wise enough for the thing they most want to get right—parenting. But why? And how do we make it better? How do we become the moms our kids really need so we can make the biggest impact on their lives?

Here's the secret I've discovered: you and I are focusing on the wrong things. We've become so caught up in whether we're doing all the right things in the right way for our children so they can get into the right schools and find the right careers and marry the right people and build productive lives. As a result we've forgotten our one true calling: to pursue God's truth and grace and presence above all else. To do this effectively, we need to learn to "Gospel ourselves" daily, applying the truths of God's Word to our everyday lives.

When we do that, so much of our insecurity and anxiety falls away. But you and I both know it's not easy to remain focused on Jesus when the washing machine is on the fritz and your preschooler is glaring death rays at her broccoli and the neighbor just called to complain about your son bullying hers. Our response in those moments is determined by what we believe, what we've been building our lives and our hopes on, and the One we've decided we belong to. Will we serve Him no matter what?

In the pages to come, we'll consider some of the top reasons so many of us are floundering, even failing, at this precious, vital, God-given role of motherhood. While we're going to talk about some hard truths, we're also going to discover some beautiful

truths that bring God's hope to our broken places. I hope you'll invite some friends to join you in working through the book and the study questions so that together you can challenge and encourage one another toward lasting change.

As we ask God to reveal any areas of our hearts He needs to work on, we'll find His grace touching our hurting places and bringing us peace about the kinds of moms we are. We'll begin to learn what it means to follow God fully as we raise our children to know and love Him well—and then trust Him with the outcome.

Ready to dig in?



Why Enough Always Feels Out of Reach

The cool, refreshing water eased the ache of my sore muscles as I slid through the pool. I began swimming my slow laps, trying to make my body do what it did when I was sixteen and on the county swim team. Hair braided back, goggles on, and swim skirt flapping in my wake, I was on a mission—ten laps or bust.

Pathetic, right?

But ten measly laps felt like an aggressive goal that day. I'd completed only eight the day before, and it nearly killed me. This from the girl who used to swim a mile or more at each practice. Twenty-five years and a couple of kids will do that to you.

Did I mention they weren't consecutive laps? That's right. This unfit mama had to stop for air in between every other lap. I'd sprint one lap, then ease my way through the next and pause at the edge of the pool to catch my breath for about a minute (and dutifully note the location of my kids) before trying to do it again. Don't you dare laugh. I think it's very athletic of me to sprint anywhere at all.

During one of my stops for air that particular day, I overheard an animated conversation between a mother and her son, who was maybe a year or two older than my younger son. The mom, whom I knew from a local Bible study group, happened to be standing close to me in the pool, so it really wasn't my fault I was eavesdropping. Their tones clearly suggested something was wrong when the little boy said, "He did it again!"

The mom and another mom who was with her began to ask him questions, and my ears perked up when I thought I heard my son's name. My fears were confirmed as the little boy described what his attacker was wearing—exactly what my son had on that day.

I gave up my intention to sprint the last three laps and swam over to the animated group with my heart pounding and my lungs on fire from my recent athletic display. "Ladies, what's going on? It sounded like you were talking about my son."

"Well, Brooke," the boy's mom said, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but your son caused my son to have to go to the emergency room last week. He punched him in the chest and then followed it up with a knee to the chest, and my son was in so much pain we took him to the ER. We thought something was broken." I gasped and placed my hand over my heart. But there was more. "Thankfully, he's just bruised, but my son has informed me that your son just did it again."

Do I even need to tell you how I felt in that moment? Probably not. You've had your own moments of Mom Shame. I apologized to the mom whose son was hurt and then climbed out of the

pool to get my son, who had been playing on the upper deck during Adult Swim. We removed ourselves from the situation, far enough away to talk without embarrassing him any more than necessary, and I shared with him what I had just been told. He didn't deny it. He just sat there with a sort of shocked look on his face as he tried to process what I had said.

After some back-and-forth detective work, I came to the conclusion that he really hadn't meant to hurt the other child. A group of boys had been playing a fighting game in the water, and everyone was punching and kicking everyone else. Apparently my son is such a brute that he was able to plow his fist toward the little boy's chest underneath the water and actually cause damage. Sigh.

After we worked through it (him telling me everyone was doing it, me telling him that didn't matter one bit and threatening his life if he ever played that game again), he walked back over to his friends, drew the boy aside, and asked him for forgiveness. In their eyes all was well. In mine it was just one more humbling example of how I don't have what it takes to control my son.

If you were sitting across from me at our favorite coffee shop right now, I would look into your eyes and tell you I've been fighting for this boy since he was born. I would tear up as I describe how the Lord showed me early on that my child was a fighter, and then I'd explain how I spent too many years fighting against his natural tendency to push past boundaries. I would share that when he was five, the Lord graciously changed my perspective and showed me I needed to fight *for* him, not *against* him (we'll talk about that concept more in a later chapter) and how I've been try-

ing to do that ever since. I would tell you I've worked hard to embrace who my sons are and how God made them, and I would describe how I'm trying to shape them instead of change them. I would let you know that over and over again I've submitted to Jesus my embarrassment and fears for them and that most of the time I feel pretty confident this is how God wants me to parent my boys.

But that day as I walked away from my son and collapsed into my pool chair, those old, familiar feelings came rushing back. *How much longer will I have to fight this battle, Lord? No matter how hard I try, pray, and fight for this boy, I just don't seem to be able to get through. I don't have what it takes to be his mom, Lord. I'm just not enough.*

Within seconds the dialogue in my head had me convinced the ER incident was all my fault. I forgot that eight-year-old boys are prone to impulsiveness. That he is a naturally strong little boy. That at the time he was detoxing from a medicine we were taking him off didn't even enter my mind. All I could think about was that *I* had failed. *I* was responsible for his every behavior. I wanted to give up.

The longer I sat on the pool deck and entertained that internal conversation, the worse I felt. Eventually my body posture—what was happening on the outside—matched what was happening on the inside. I sat slumped down in my chair, head back, eyes closed, tuned out.

The only thing I could hear was *not enough*. Actually it felt like the whole world was united in screaming at me, “You're not

enough!” I don’t know about you, but when I feel the weight of my child’s entire future on my shoulders—as I did that day—my natural inclination is to get out from under it and look for an escape, some affirmation that what I feel in my heart isn’t true and I really can do this mom thing right.

If we did an Internet search for the phrase “I don’t feel like I’m enough,” we’d find a multitude of resources to help change our minds. TinyBuddha.com would give us seven things to do when we feel we’re not enough. *Psychology Today* would help us understand how the traumas from our past undermine and skew our perspective. Some websites would give us positive mantras to speak over our lives when we feel the weight of “not enough,” while others would produce a list of Bible verses to make us feel better about our contributions to the world. Yes, most of us long for reassurance that we’re enough, and we are willing to do just about anything to erase the feeling that we’re *not*.

But what if all those assurances of our enough-ness are wrong?

What if instead of trying to eliminate or overcome the idea that we’re not enough, we embraced it? What if instead of convincing ourselves that we’ve got what it takes, we entertained the notion that God quite possibly made us to need Him—not just for a few minutes, not just for our salvation, but for every minute of every day? Crazy, right?

I’ve spent a good deal of time searching the Bible for the concept that human beings were designed to be enough on their own, but I haven’t been able to find any passages that declare our innate awesomeness is just waiting to be revealed. What I *have* found is

consistent evidence of just the opposite: you and I are both something of a mess.

As I look at the Word of God, I clearly see I'm not enough. Verses like John 15:5 ("I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."), 2 Corinthians 12:9 ("But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"), and Ezekiel 36:26 ("I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.") prove it to me, and they are just a few of the verses we'll be diving into. Even though God graciously uses my experiences over and over again to remind me that I'm not enough, I don't really need them to know it's true.

You may disagree with me, saying, "Wait a minute! God is enough, so I'm enough!" Or "God will give me everything I need; therefore, I'm enough." Or even "Jesus lives in me, so He makes me enough." And I see the arguments behind all these different ways of assuring ourselves that we do have what it takes to succeed at whatever we set our minds to. Still, I think the overarching theme of Scripture proves them wrong. The Gospel isn't, at its core, about us ever being enough on our own. We grow. We change. But we never arrive. We never stop needing.

The word *enough* means "to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations." It's the "fully" part of the definition that catches me. If we're "fully" able to meet demands, needs, or expectations, why would we continue to need Jesus? As I read the Scriptures, we

are in a state of perpetual need for His intervention in our lives. We are supposed to be dependent on Him for everything. We may be saved and have all the benefits of that salvation, and certainly when God looks on true Christians, He no longer sees our sin but the righteousness of His Son. With Jesus we have everything we need, but that doesn't take away our need for Him to give it. We don't become capable of developing the necessary strength in ourselves. The problem is with the placement of our eyes. When we believe we are enough—even when we feel Jesus's enough makes us enough—we're placing our eyes on ourselves, as if our abilities are top priority. On the other hand, when we acknowledge our constant need for and dependence on Him, our eyes are placed on Him, and His priorities take over.

God is no doubt perfect, and He is more than enough to make up for our lack. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), but that "divine power" still comes from Him, not from somewhere inside us that is independent of Him. We clearly need God—not just once for salvation, but constantly and continually and in more ways than we can count. Whatever enough He gives us access to still comes from Him; He is its source. If we were enough on our own, we wouldn't need Jesus, and, friend, we all desperately need Jesus.

Sure, you and I both know moms who look like they have what it takes. Their homes are immaculate, and their children are well behaved (and able to do long division the very first time). They work fifty-hour weeks or volunteer for all the school events,

have perfectly manicured nails, and enjoy a weekly date night with the love of their lives. They're in perfect shape, not a hair out of place, all plates spinning at maximum speed without the slightest threat of even the tiniest wobble.

From the outside it looks pretty convincing.

But at that mom's core—that deepest, darkest part of her heart where the truth resides—she knows she's not enough. She sees the spots and blemishes no one else suspects. She knows how much effort it takes to keep those plates spinning and how tired she is. She hears herself yell way too much, criticize too often, or choose the easier way over the right way because she's just so utterly exhausted. She knows the helpless feeling of watching her dreams of changing the world take a back seat to folding laundry and doing dishes. She knows the longing for what might have been and the weariness of going to bed at night in tears because she wasn't the kind of mom she wanted to be that day.

Could that woman be you? I've wanted it to be me . . . to at least look from the outside like I know what I'm doing. But I'm pretty convinced that when people look at me, they see the truth—that I fall short a lot more often than I get it right.

We long to be the moms our kids need, but all we can see is how we're coming up short.

We're not abusive, crazed lunatics who are ruining our children on purpose or squandering our lives. We're just normal, everyday moms who listen to our kids squabble for the fifty-seventh time in a day and wonder if we're getting anything right. We know in our hearts that much of the time we don't, and we worry

that we've missed our chance as we watch our babies grow way too fast and mature way too slow.

It's not that we're particularly bad at being moms or that we don't want to be moms. We're just keenly aware of how often we get it wrong. But maybe that's the way God meant it to be.

"But, Brooke," you say, "I need some kind of assurance that I'm going to get the hang of this mom thing one day and it will all come easier. I need to be able to be enough!"

Do you?

WHO AM I?

It might seem a stretch, but I see some similarities between a mother's call to guide her children safely through the wilderness of this world and the call of Moses to lead God's chosen people out of Egypt. Born to Hebrew parents but raised as the pharaoh's son, Moses led an exceptional life. He was highly educated in the ways of the Egyptians. He would have been instructed in astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, engineering, music, and art—the best of what their limited knowledge could offer. He was fully enveloped in their way of life and seemed to be well accepted by Pharaoh. Moses was on the fast track to a life of ease and influence, but in an instant everything changed. We read the story in Exodus 2:11–15.

One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked

this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

We find our would-be hero, a man who has enjoyed the best that money and position could buy, running for his life. Moses was intended to be royalty. Instead, because he murdered an Egyptian, he ran away and became a shepherd. Moses eventually married and hid himself away. Meanwhile, God heard the groaning of His people, who were enslaved by the cruel Egyptians, and decided to intervene. He spoke to Moses in the wilderness one day from a burning bush and instructed him to lead God's people out of Egypt. Our murdering, almost-royalty runaway then found himself in a position to answer to his Creator.

Let's read Exodus 3:11–12 and learn what Moses's response to God tells us about our own hearts' desire to be enough.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought

the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Go back and reread those verses, and pay special attention to the first question Moses asked the Lord when he met Him in the burning bush. Do you see it?

Moses asked, “Who am I?”

Don’t misunderstand. Moses knew exactly who he was: a despised Hebrew who had been raised as royalty. He knew he had killed a man and run away. And he knew in no uncertain terms that God had picked the wrong guy for the job. He immediately objected to God’s call because of his own insufficiencies—weaknesses, sin patterns, and fears he knew only too well—and in Exodus 3:11, Moses asked the question everyone who has been called by God to do anything out of his or her comfort zone asks:

He asked, “Who am I?”

What I think he meant was, “Who? Me?” In other words, “I know who I am, Lord, and there has to be somebody better.”

Isn’t that how you would feel if God called you to something that big? It’s exactly how I feel sometimes when I look at the unique needs of my children, and when that happens, my heart longs for affirmation.

It reminds me of the time my younger son pitched his first baseball game. The youngest on the team by at least two years, my then eight-year-old son looked tiny out there on that pitcher’s mound. I could see the fear in his eyes as he stared down the player at bat (who must’ve looked a little like Goliath!). He hesitated and

threw his first ball, and I could see the disappointment crushing his spirit. He wanted to strike everyone out and thought he could! His body slumped, and his head started to sag, so I did what any self-respecting mom would do. I stood up, walked to the fence, and screamed, “You can do this!”

As his mom, I wanted to fill his heart with confidence. Whether it was his own or mine didn’t matter. I knew he could do it, because I’d seen him work his tail off in practice. He possessed the necessary skill to get the job done. He just needed to be reminded.

Moses, however, did not have what it took to succeed at leading his people, and God’s reply to him wasn’t intended to make him think he did.

In this decisive moment when he might’ve thought he most needed God to yell encouragement, he didn’t get it. God didn’t answer Moses with personal affirmations. He didn’t tell him he was the perfect guy for the job. He didn’t create a bullet-point list of Moses’s good character qualities to convince him he could do it, and He didn’t promise to equip him along the way. He didn’t send him an e-mail with hundreds of “I am . . .” statements about his work and value to the kingdom, and he didn’t yell, “You can do this!” from the sidelines. No, God gave Moses something much more important.

Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”
He [God] said, “But I will be with you.” (Exodus 3:11–12)

Moses said, “You’ve got the wrong guy. I don’t have what it takes.”

God said, “It doesn’t matter. I will be with you.”

God promised Moses His presence, nothing else. Not courage, not resources, not skill. Just His presence. Instead of building Moses up or telling him He’d provide everything he needed, He simply said, “I will be with you.” God never told Moses he was enough or even that His strength or presence would make him enough. He simply said, “I AM and I will be, and that’s enough for you.”

God never told Moses he needed to be enough. So why then do we feel we have to be?

Believing we’re enough brings us peace, satisfaction, pleasure, and intense relief—not to mention a heady sense of being in control of the situation. I like feeling that I have what it takes, that I’m up for the task. There are some events and situations in my life that I *am* clearly capable of handling. I’ve tasted enough of those moments to know I like living there, and of course when I like something, I want more of it! Everyone wants to feel confident, in charge, and competent.

Think for a moment how it feels to be out of control, caught unprepared or unaware. Not good, right? Take a moment to remember the last time you felt totally out of control. How did you feel? What was your body doing? Maybe your heart beat a little faster and your breaths got shorter. Maybe your face and neck got red and you started to sweat. (No? Just me?) Our bodies react when we sense ourselves losing control of a situation, and within

moments we instinctively begin to seek a way back to safety. God made our bodies and minds to desire a state of peace.

The Bible tells us that unfortunately “in this world [we] will have trouble” (John 16:33, NIV). While our bodies were made to seek peace emotionally and physically, the world around us, fallen and shaken by sin, makes it hard to come by. The rest of John 16:33 tells us the solution promised by Jesus: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (NIV).

Peace—that thing all mothers want more than life itself—comes only from trusting God to be all we need. Peace isn’t something we can manufacture but something He manifests.

The moment we start believing that we *should* be enough, that peace is gone. We start to ask, *What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I _____ [fill in the blank] like everyone else? Why am I never enough?* Our whole belief system starts to break down because we are failing to live up to our own expectations. What we want to be true and what is true are two different things.

WHO IS GOD?

I remember our first search for childcare help as I prepared to go back to work several months after the birth of our first son. We lived more than an hour from my hometown and still felt fairly new to the community. Having grown up in a small town where everyone knew everyone else, the concept of interviewing someone to take care of our child was a little foreign. At home we

would've known who was okay and who wasn't. In truth, we probably would've known their entire family history and maybe other kinds of history too, because word gets out in a small town.

In the city we'd moved to, things were a little different. We didn't even know the names of all our neighbors up the street, much less who could be trusted to care for our child! Believe it or not, I could usually go to Walmart with dirty hair and mismatched clothes and not see a single soul I knew. (Try that in a small town!) We had no idea where to start, so we began to ask the people we did know until we found a woman who seemed to fit the bill, and then we asked her over for dinner.

I lit all my favorite candles and prepared a big, southern, home-cooked meal for her—sweet tea (so sweet it could walk), my grandmother's signature chicken casserole, creamy mashed potatoes, green beans cooked in bacon fat, and biscuits to sop it all up. I also made a list of questions I'd found on the Internet, questions that seemed like the right ones to tell me if she could handle the most precious thing to me in the world.

All because I needed to get to know her.

Moses was no different. God was asking him to do some pretty big stuff, things that would change the course of his life forever, no turning back. So it makes sense that the very next question Moses asked was about who God is. Could he trust God with his life?

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to

you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13)

The task God asked of him would require great trust on Moses's part. He needed to know, and I mean really know, the character, love, and promises of God in order to make the journey. Once again God's answer to Moses is noteworthy and maybe not exactly what we would expect.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14)

All He did was give Moses His name.

I've tried over and over to really get a feel for the significance of the words *I AM* in this verse, but every time I try to dig in, my mind feels like it can't contain the enormity of this concept. In English we learn the form of the verb *to be*. In French it's *je suis*. In Spanish it's *yo soy*. It simply is what it is. If I were a better writer, perhaps I could do it justice, or perhaps no writer could ever fully describe the majesty of this phrase: "I AM WHO I AM." With these words God says, "You don't really need specific details. You just need to know I'm here. I AM; therefore, you are. Not the other way around." That truth holds for us today, and the beauty of it blows my mind. I'm sure it blew Moses's mind too.

John Piper says, "The reason knowing the names of God will help us trust Him with our daily affairs and with our eternal

destinies is that in Scripture a person's name often signifies his character or ability or mission."¹ We have to know who God is in order to trust Him fully. Unless we know Him well, we'll make Him what we want Him to be, creating a God in our minds who doesn't exist on the pages of the Bible.

God says, "Trust Me, not yourself. All you really need is Me. I'll have to be enough for you."

I AM

Maybe the real question then is not, Why can't I ever be enough? but instead, Why isn't Jesus enough for me? As I've grown in my faith, I've realized that certain expressions of our faith are easy to say but hard to understand and live out. "Jesus is enough for me" might be one of them.

Let's look at the gospel of John, where Jesus makes seven famous "I AM" statements that further illuminate the chasm between who God is and who we are. Read each of the following verses, and then read the words immediately after them as if Jesus is speaking right to you.

1. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). *I will sustain you, provide for you, and fill you. You don't have to be enough.*
2. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). *I will always show you the way. I will be*

the way. Keep your eyes on Me, and you'll never stumble off the path.

3. "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). *You must come through Me to get to My Father. Once you're in, I will provide a hedge of protection around you. I'm your safe place. I'm where you belong. Other people's opinions of you don't matter when you're with Me. You're in. You don't have to be enough. It's My worth, My sacrifice that earns you the right to be with My Father.*
4. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). *I accept responsibility for you. You don't have to be enough, because I am enough for you.*
5. "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). *I am all the power, strength, and fullness of life you need. You don't have to look anywhere else. I have made a way for you not just here on earth but for always. I have and am everything it takes.*
6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). *In the Father's presence is the peace you crave, and I am the only way to Him. Any other peace is less than*

I want to give you. You don't need to create peace for yourself by trying to be enough. I am your peace.

7. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). *Your very existence depends on Me. I designed you to need Me. When we're connected, I'll provide everything you need. I'll sustain you. You don't have to be enough.*

As you breathe in these truths, pause with me for a moment and listen to the Holy Spirit say, "*You don't need to be enough, because Jesus was and is and will always be enough. You can just be you and let Jesus be the rest.*"

"Needing [Jesus] every hour is not defeat. It is an appetite put there by God that only he can fill."²



Hard Truth

You and I are not enough, and we never will be.

Beautiful Truth

Jesus is all the enough we will ever need.



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