



Motherhood is a Refining Fire by Kathryn Butler, Desiring God

Years of training in surgery equipped me with the skills and confidence to stop massive bleeding, remove gallbladders, and open the chest in under half a minute.

These skills meant bupkis when my toddler set a Scrabble game on fire.

Social media often depicts motherhood as a pristine, idyllic experience, replete with frolics through flower-draped meadows, matching outfits with crisp white collars, and platters of baked goods perfuming the air. The practicalities of motherhood, however, are often far messier than the ideal images we so jealously guard. Bruises and spit-up visit more frequently than chai spice and all-natural cotton. Tantrums and squabbles turn our beautifully orchestrated plans to rubble. We pride ourselves in our patience until another bottle of milk soaks the carpet. In the worst moments, we look at our failures, at the muddy work of our own hands, and plead for escape.

Weary mom, take heart. Those moments — the hardest, the most broken — are precisely when God can, in the words of John Bunyan, do his “wounding work,” conforming you into the image of his Son (Works of John Bunyan, 1:720). Motherhood is a gift and a blessing. It is a tremendous privilege to shepherd young hearts. It is also a refining fire, shaping us through its most challenging trials into greater Christlikeness.

Far from Idyllic

I encountered the chaotic realities of motherhood — and the ugliness within me — early in my parenting journey. Shortly after I left clinical practice in order to homeschool, I approached each morning with my kids as I would have approached an operation at work: methodically, my forehead crinkled in concentration as I arranged all the moments like glowing panels in a stained-glass window. On one such morning, I awoke with a throbbing headache but still tackled the day, resolved to cram learning, joy, togetherness, and productivity into every minute.

Then it started.

First, my three-year-old son decided to argue about almost everything: combing his hair, getting dressed, wearing a life preserver indoors, using a napkin, eating toast, his sister's turtle socks, his sister's existence, eating soup,

not eating soup, hanging out of a window, and peregrine falcons.

She stood on chairs, ripped books, and smeared Goldfish spittle on every surface. She whacked her head, wrist, foot, shoulder, and pinkie toe six times during illicit living-room acrobatics.

There was screaming. There were bloodied lips. There was a preschooler escaping outside into the snow in socks. There was that same preschooler howling because his feet were cold. Then there was smoke emanating from a Scrabble box after my daughter switched on a halogen light high on a games shelf.

As I snatched up the smoking box, I wanted to give up and return to my job at the hospital, where people listened to what I said and respected my words. I wanted to retreat to a place where I felt competent, where what I did seemed to matter. As these thoughts stormed my mind, my son asked for a drink of milk. With my last nerve frayed, I responded in a despicable way: I yelled at him.

As his face crumpled and his eyes welled with tears, the truth felt like a thunderclap in my brain: What mattered were not my accomplishments in a different season but the hearts placed into my care at that moment (Ephesians 6:4). My son's tears were a mirror held to my face. In them, I saw the sin I cultivated with each groan of resentment. Through them, the Spirit confronted me to repent and receive grace through Christ.

Rest for the Weary

“Children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3), a gift from God for us to nurture, treasure, and shepherd (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). As mothers, we adore our children, we cherish them, and we long to join our husbands in bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of Christ (Ephesians 6:4).

But sometimes — if not oftentimes — our days look grubby against the ideal in our minds, our parenting skills deeply lacking compared to those of our heavenly Father. As fallen women caring for fallen children in a fallen world, too often parenting leaves us weary, bedraggled, and resentful. The long hours frequently sap our strength. If we leave a job to spend our days at home with our kids, we can question our self-worth when diapers and peanut

butter and jelly replace meetings and paychecks and promotions. If we juggle work both inside and outside the home, our wells may run dry as we give every last ounce of ourselves in service.

In such moments, when our bones ache and we yearn for rest, our efforts as mothers can fall short. We raise our voices. We dismiss a child's plea. We break promises. Bitterness simmers. Complaints well up from within.

Again, weary mother, take heart. In Christ, God is faithful to forgive whatever you confess (1 John 1:9). Through the cross, he has separated your sins from you "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). As fatigue weighs down your limbs and you pace with a child in the dead of night, he sees your service. He knows your exhaustion (Hebrews 4:15). He invites you to the true rest that comes only from him (Matthew 11:28).

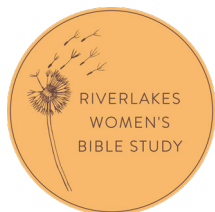
And he can work through even those long, arduous days for your good and his glory (Romans 8:28).

A Refining Fire

As he did with my angry outburst over a smoking Scrabble box, God can work through every broken moment and every failure to remind us that his grace is sufficient,

and his "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). In his mercy, the God who saves us through the blood of Christ can wash our filthiest rags white as snow (Isaiah 1:18; 64:6), working through our worst parenting days to shape us into "the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). He does great things with the meager; he does beautiful things with the misshapen. He chooses the smallest, the humblest, the most broken as his servants (1 Samuel 16:10-12; Numbers 12:3; 1 Timothy 1:15). He works for good through the greatest calamities (Genesis 50:20). When his beloved people feel broken and crushed, he reaches through the firmament and in love makes things new (Revelation 21:5).

When the days bear down on you, remember that parenthood is a refining fire. It shapes. It tears down. It reduces falsehoods and artifice to ashes. Although the flames sting, through them God will burn away the sinful dross that's really weighing down your weary soul. He will whittle and sculpt you into the image of Christ. And he will ignite in your heart a delight not in the work of your own hands, but in the One who has adopted you as his own beloved daughter (Ephesians 1:5) — no matter how your moments of motherhood unfold.



Women's Bible Study

Draw close to the Lord and other women, find support and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in a small group environment. You may choose Thursday mornings or Tuesday

evenings for fellowship, discussion, prayer, and encouragement. Join us as we walk through the books of 1 & 2 Corinthians. A children's program is available for both morning and evening groups.

RiverLakes Women Tuesday PM

Education Bldg.,
Room 210/212
6:00 -8:00 pm
Registration Fee: \$25

RiverLakes Women Thursday AM

Community Center
9:30am-11:30am
Registration Fee: \$25

Cheerleaders



Our Cheerleaders group meet monthly on the third Saturday of each month from September to May. Our desire is to encourage and inspire old and new friendships for widows and mature single women. Join us and be supported

as we continue to grow in our faith making disciples who make disciples, deepening our roots together. Contact Carol Feil, carolmom64@gmail.com, for more information.

Embrace Grace



Tuesdays, 6:00 - 8:00pm

Resumes January 27

Embrace Grace exists to love and encourage single and pregnant young women and their families. Women experiencing unexpected pregnancies receive practical, spiritual, and emotional support through this 13-week pro-life support group. Contact Carol Edwards (661) 619-0261 to sign up.

Prayer Quilt Ministry



Prayer quilts are sewn by a team of women committed to sharing the burden of others through prayer and the giving of quilts. The quilts are completed with knots tied by our praying congregation and given as tangible expressions of God's love to people with prayer needs. Anyone who is facing a special need for prayer such as surgery, treatment or a crisis illness may receive a quilt when they are sponsored by someone attending RiverLakes Community Church. To sponsor a quilt, visit our [website](http://www.riverlakeschurch.org), call the church office (589-9733) or Kathy Palmisano (330-8055).