

CHANCES ARE, you've picked up this booklet because you are feeling down, discouraged, or hopeless. Maybe you are overwhelmed with the heavy responsibilities of parenthood. The issues are growing weightier, and it feels like the future well-being of your child lies squarely on your shoulders. You might be going through the heartaches associated with a stubborn or rebellious child—even a willful two-year-old can bring a mother to her knees. Or you could simply be worn down from the daily grind of motherhood. You have made a million decisions concerning the life of your child and have given countless instructions. You are weary, and you don't see the fruitfulness you would expect from your tireless efforts. Discouragement has set in and is robbing you of your joy.

You are a mother, and your very title describes who you are. A mother is one who gives life. But these days, far from feeling like a life giver, you feel drained of life. Perhaps you are looking around at all the other "good" Christian mothers with their "good" Christian children and wondering, "What's wrong with me and my kids? How could I be failing at one of the most important things in all of life—parenthood? How could I mess up something I was so looking forward to doing?"

In your despair you might be tempted to think, "God made a mistake when he picked me to be a mother. I'm not cut out for this job." I can assure you, Christian mother, on the authority of God's Word, that the Lord doesn't make mistakes! If he has gifted you with children, then he has called you to the "good work" of motherhood (Eph. 2:10). And if he has called you, he will give you the equipment to get the job done (2 Peter 1:3).

Motherhood is a daunting task and an overwhelming responsibility. This is especially true of mothers who seek to diligently teach and train their children in God's Word and his ways and to instill in them the desire to love God with all their hearts. Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India who saved orphaned children from Hindu temple prostitution, said of such faithful Christian mothers, "We ask far more than the usual of our boys and girls, and this way of working asks far more of us."<sup>1</sup>

Consider this about your present despair: Your feelings could be an indicator that you are indeed asking "more than the usual" of your children. Perhaps you are taking God's call to motherhood as seriously as you should and are pouring your heart and soul into the task. In the process, you have been overwhelmed because this way of working asks far more of you than you can give in your own strength.

On the other hand, maybe you haven't given your mothering responsibilities the priority in your life they should have. You haven't fulfilled God's command to teach and train your children according to Scripture (Deut. 6:5–7). Maybe you haven't taken your job as seriously as you wish you had, and now you are suffering the consequences.

### **You Are Not Alone**

Whatever circumstances have brought you to this point, you now desire to find answers to your parenting problems and hope for your discouragement. Let me encourage you that you are right where God wants you to be! He has your attention; open your ears and your heart wide to his counsel. First, notice what the Bible says about your trouble. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are

1. Quoted in Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die* (Ada, MI: Revell, 2005).

tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Let’s dissect this encouraging verse. The word for *temptation* in this context can also mean “trial.” The Greek word has the basic meaning of trying, testing, or proving. The apostle Paul, who penned this verse, was no stranger to trials. His Christian life was full of trouble! Of course, trials often provide opportunities to be tempted to sin. It is safe to assert, then, that every test from the devil’s point of view is a temptation, and every temptation from God’s point of view is a test.

Are the trials and temptations of parenting crushing and crippling you? Are you ready to give up or give in? Have you considered running away from home? (I mean it—I have!) Believe me, you are not alone.

Paul understood that neither his sufferings nor his temptations were unique. You need to understand this too. There is no problem in your current parenting situation that has not been common to mothers throughout the ages. I like to remind myself, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to every mom!” What does “common” mean? Widespread, ordinary, regular, familiar, universal, and frequent—these words describe your trial. It is important for you to remember this. Of course, your situation probably has a few unique elements, but fundamentally “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). If you believe you are the only Christian mother struggling with these issues, then you will be more easily discouraged. Defeatism thrives in isolation. In light of this verse, you should assume that other mothers are struggling too and should take courage, holding on to the hope that God has a plan to help you.

Not only is your trial *common to man*, it is one of the original struggles of the human race. Mothering woes go back as far as Eve. You might think that in an effort to encourage procreation the Bible would begin with a “happily ever after” story about marriage and children. But God does not attempt to hide the hardships of parenting in a fallen world. The very

first example of mothering portrays the reality of sinners parenting sinners. Eve experienced tremendous heartache with her first sons; remember that Cain, Eve's firstborn, was exiled for murdering her younger son, Abel. Stop and ponder this for a moment. Envy, jealousy, and murder—these acts of treachery characterize the first mothering moments in history. There's certainly not much in this story to get you excited about motherhood!

Like Eve, you are raising children in a sin-laden world. As a result, you will regularly encounter hardship in your interaction with others. Furthermore, when God pronounced his curse on Eve, it directly impacted those dearest to her. "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'" (Gen. 3:16). Some commentators interpret this curse to be a reference not only to the physical pain of labor and delivery, but also to the continued heartache a mother experiences over her children.

When you truly grasp the devastating toll that sin has taken on your ability to love God and your neighbor, you will not be surprised by the adversity associated with parenting. In fact, considering your own sin, the sins of your children, influences from the world, and Satan, it is utterly amazing that you can find one ounce of satisfaction in the parenting process! Job recognized the inevitability of trouble in this life. "Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). I have heard it said that "parenting is the hardest job you will ever love." It is so very true! Therefore, expect trouble.

While we must expect trouble, we must not miss the promises. In the midst of this turmoil, God gave Eve hope. He gave her another son, the promise of a Savior, and redemption. Remember that God is faithful! He was faithful to Eve after her failure and sin and the sin of her children, and he will be faithful to you. He will not give you more than you can handle. Are you feeling like you can't handle your present trial? God promises that you