

Heidi St. John

MOM
A DAILY
DEVOTIONAL
TO ENCOURAGE
AND EMPOWER
EVERYDAY MOMS
STRONG

365

MomStrong *365*

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MomStrong 365: A Daily Devotional to Encourage and Empower Everyday Moms

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Introduction

WHEN MY PUBLISHER APPROACHED me about the possibility of writing a 365-day devotional, my heart soared. *I love devotionals*, I thought to myself. In fact, some of my favorite books are devotionals I was given when I was a young mother.

Naively, I thought that I would be in my Bible every single day—and even more naively, I thought I would have something to write for you. As you may have guessed, that wasn't always the case. Some days, I struggled to have anything good to say, let alone write, but the Lord was faithful to encourage my heart through the many, many months that I spent working on the book you're holding in your hands.

Motherhood is like that too, isn't it? I thank God for the women in my life who understand the struggle, don't you? Some days, we feel like we've got it down—we're reading our Bible faithfully, discipling our kids, and trying new recipes just for grins... and other days, we wonder what in the world God was thinking when He gave us kids! The good news, of course, is that God is consistently with us throughout the ebb and flow of motherhood. When He sees you, mom, He sees beyond the work-in-progress. He sees what you are becoming.

I hope that as you read these daily devotions, your heart will be reminded that God has made you for this time in history and that He is always at work. I hope

you laugh too—at the mistakes I've made along the way and at God's kindness in redeeming all of it.

As you read, be sure to pay attention to the Bible verses that correlate to these short little devotions every day. Truth is, I don't have any wisdom to give you on my own. God's Word is life giving and powerful. I pray that what the Holy Spirit gave me is of encouragement to you as you raise your children up in the wisdom of the Lord.

Precious mom, there's never been a more important time to study God's Word. There's never been a more important time to ask for His wisdom, and there's never been a more important time to commit to being the mother that God has raised you up to be for such a time as this. You may be a new mother, or you may have been at this for a while. You may have transitioned to the wonderful role of grandmother, or you may still be actively discipling young children. No matter where you are on the journey, it's very clear—this generation of young people needs mothers who are grounded in the rich soil of God's Word and who are committed to teaching it to their children and grandchildren.

It is my prayer that we would all become the mothers and grandmothers and the teachers, mentors, and friends that these children need for such a time as this.

Where's Your Confidence?

My heart is confident in you, O God; no wonder I can sing your praises with all my heart!

PSALM 108:1

MY ALARM WENT OFF AT 6:30 on a dark, cold January morning. With all the new-year enthusiasm I could muster, I slowly made my way to the shower. Mornings are not my thing, but like many people, I had made a few promises on January 1, and I was determined to keep them. Promise number one: get up earlier.

This might be a mistake, I thought to myself. After all, the kids had me up late talking the night before. How could I get up earlier if I couldn't go to bed earlier?

As the shower steamed, my “to do” list grew. Maybe getting up at 6:30 was not going to work. Maybe I needed to get up at 5:30. I laughed out loud. It was only 6:53 a.m., and already I was wondering how I could do all that was in front of me. The self-talk started again. *Come on, Heidi! You can do it!* Yes, this was going to be the year “I” would keep all of my resolutions.

By 7:30 a.m. the kids were arguing. Fifteen loads of laundry sat coldly staring at me. I was frustrated, defeated, and discouraged when I finally did the thing I should have done *first*: I sat down and opened my Bible.

In Psalm 108:2-3, I read, “Wake up, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song. I will thank you, LORD, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations.”

As I read, the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit comforted and convicted me. I noted that David sang praises because his confidence was in God! I knew that I was placing my confidence in my own ability—not in God. David's confidence moved him to thank the Lord “among all the people” as he greeted the day with a song. I had not greeted “my people” with a song. Instead, they were greeted by a grouchy mom who had not focused her attention on the One who could give her direction. Have you been that mom too?

As you think about your day today, consider the life of David. When our confidence is in Christ, we can relax, knowing that He will give us the direction we need. A mom who finds her confidence in God can start her day with a song and teach her children to do the same.

Lord, teach us to come to You first, knowing that You guide and direct us.

The Gospel: The Greatest Privilege

You are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

GALATIANS 3:28-29

PRIVILEGE. IT IS A SOURCE OF much conversation in our world today, but when was the last time you considered the privilege you have under the gospel? Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead secured an incredible privilege for those who claim His name: we are no longer slaves to sin, but rather, we are seen as sons and daughters of God. We are *heirs* of God, and as such, God's promise to Abraham belongs to us.

Think of it! Through faith alone—dependent on *nothing* that we could do—the moment we declare our faith in God, He grants us the *privilege* of being adopted into His family. The apostle Paul teaches that this is like “putting on new clothes” (Galatians 3:27). I don't know about you, but a new outfit that fits perfectly makes me stand a little taller. As mothers, we know why this matters, don't we?

It's even better to be dressed as children of God. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are able to “put on” the righteousness of God. It's a miracle, really—a privilege that we should celebrate every day. The good news is simply this: *anyone* can belong to Christ. This is the heart of the gospel—and it's available to us all, regardless of ethnicity or economic background. Even the most hardened criminal or most rebellious child can become a son or daughter of Abraham and inherit the promises of God.

How about you? Are you trusting in the promises of God? Are you living your life in view of the amazing inheritance that's waiting for you in heaven?

As I consider my earthly lineage in light of my heavenly destiny as a co-heir with Christ, the things of this world do indeed grow “strangely dim,” as the old hymn says. I can only say *thank you* to the One who adopted me into His family. Me. A child of God. What a privilege.

As mothers, the best gift we can ever give our children is to explain to them the nature of true privilege and the great love of the One who has given us the greatest privilege of all: the chance to be called the sons and daughters of God.

There can be no greater joy than to see our children grasp this truth, accept the free gift of salvation through faith, and believe in the promises of God themselves.

That's privilege.

All Will Be Well

Now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you.
O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid."

ISAIAH 43:1

THE PROPHET ISAIAH SEEMS TO HAVE a window into our weary, sometimes discouraged human hearts as he shares God's heart and reminds us of God's extravagant love for His children. The echo that comes back to my heart after reading Isaiah 43:1 is simple: "All is well."

Mothers know the power of this gentle reassurance. When your child comes to you in the middle of the night, afraid of the dark or worried about tomorrow's math test, you cradle your child in your arms or look into your teen's worried expression to offer the confident reassurance that *all will be well*.

When we know how loved we are, that God has a plan, and that it will be accomplished, we can rest. When we understand the power of this promise, we find comfort. Allow me to offer a very loose translation of Isaiah 43:1 for your mama soul: *Now, precious mom, listen to the Lord who created you. Remember, that just as you were present while your children were formed in your womb, God was present as you were being formed. Do not be afraid.*

Remember the first time you heard your child's heartbeat and how strong the bond was with this child you had never even seen? Remember that first kick? Even the searing pain of childbirth paled in comparison to hearing that first cry, didn't it? The agonizing wait for that precious adoption to be finalized was worth every tear you cried and every prayer you sent heavenward.

I will never forget meeting my first child. After two agonizing days of back labor, my husband gently lifted her to my breast. I still cry as I write about it, more than thirty years later. "Shhhhhh, Savannah. Don't be afraid. Mama's here. I love you. I know your name. *You. Are. Mine.* All will be well."

What we say to our children is exactly what Isaiah is telling us about the boundless love of God. To His flailing child He gently says, "*Shhhhhh. Don't be afraid. I know your name. You. Are. Mine. All will be well.*"

Love is the great motivator, isn't it? Apart from God Himself, no one knows the depths love will go to for a child as a mother does. Just as your heart toward your child is good, God's heart toward you is also good. The love that you have for your children is only a glimpse into God's heart for you.

The One who formed you says, "Don't be afraid."

All will be well.

Enough Already!

Be wise enough to know when to quit.

PROVERBS 23:4

“WHERE DOES A MOTHER GO TO RESIGN?” I yelled. After a long day of homeschooling, chores, errands, and refereeing sibling squabbles, it was finally dinnertime at the St. Johns’. I had planned a peaceful dinner—even going so far as to put candles on the table and jazz music on the stereo. I don’t know what I was hoping for, but I can say with certainty that I was hoping for more than I got in return.

Hot tears ran down my face as I slammed the dishwasher shut.

Instinctively, my husband sensed I had reached my breaking point. “Babe, why don’t you sit this round out?” he said, looking up from his work.

I exploded. “Sit it out?! Really?! I’ve been working all day on this meal! No one ever listens to me! No one ever helps! I quit!”

My patient husband watched silently as I blew the candles out, grabbed my keys, and headed to the car. I wasn’t going anywhere, but I sure wished I could. Tahiti sounded good. Or Target. I didn’t care, if it meant I could sit in relative peace and be asked what *I* wanted for a change. For two hours, I sat in the driveway, working out my salvation and my motherhood. When I went back in the house, it was sparkling clean—and the kids had all written apology notes. You’d think I felt better, but deep down, I was embarrassed. This was *not* the mother I wanted them to remember.

Sometimes, we just want to quit—and sometimes, quitting is the right thing to do. We may need to quit trying to be the Pinterest Mom. Maybe it’s time to step down from leading that small group in order to embrace a season of little ones. Or maybe, just maybe, we need to quit being so hard on ourselves.

Let’s be honest: most of us battle burnout at some point in our mothering. Sometimes, the day-to-day burdens are simply heavier than we expected. Sometimes, unexpected trials take us by surprise. No season of motherhood is immune to burnout.

We need wisdom in every stage—and praise God, He offers the wisdom we need through His Word. In Proverbs 23:4, Solomon wisely advises us to “know when to quit.” Although he’s not saying to quit mothering, we can take it as a reminder to know our limits and to seek counsel *before* an emotional explosion instead of after. Knowing when to quit isn’t a sign of weakness; it’s a sign of strength. Knowing your boundaries—first for you, and then for your family—is a blessing.

Precious to God

Others were given in exchange for you. I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you.

ISAIAH 43:4

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A MOMENT where you wondered if there was something else—something “more important” that you could be doing instead of shepherding and raising children? If so, you’re not alone.

Quietly, we have relinquished our right and responsibility to be the primary influence in the lives of our children—no matter how innocently—and yielded it to youth pastors and schoolteachers. And what message are we sending? Motherhood is a precious responsibility, and the window we have to influence our children closes quickly. If you have forgotten, even for a moment, how precious your role is, let’s look to God’s Word for a change in perspective.

In Isaiah 43, the prophet makes a reference to “others” who were given in exchange for “their lives.” But who were the “others”? Most Bible scholars believe it’s a reference to the Egyptians. God seems to be trying to get through to the Israelites, who tended to forget that God had ransomed them from a life of slavery and servitude. Because of His love, God would go to great lengths for the people He chose as His. He was saying, in essence, “Look! I gave up the Egyptians, and I’m ready to give up others too, if it becomes necessary. That’s how much I love you.”

God has gone to extravagant lengths, even His own Son’s death on the cross, to ransom and redeem us. God’s love isn’t mere words. When God says, “I love you,” you can count on it being backed up by actions.

My question is—do our children know how precious they are to us? Are we ready to give up whatever God asks us to give up for our family to flourish and grow strong in Christ? Sometimes, we find we are in a season of real sacrifice. Over time, those small decisions to prioritize our children will yield huge dividends.

Love requires sacrifice. In a self-centered culture, love requires us to look beyond a temporary goal of more money or a bigger house and instead focus our gaze far into the future as we make daily choices for the good of our children and family.

If our ultimate aim is to grow to be more like Christ, let’s do it in every area of our lives, starting with our marriages and our children. Yes, you may trade some things in this season of your life to make time for training tender hearts, but I promise you, the trade will be worth it.

A Prayer for Every Season of Motherhood

This is the confidence we have in approaching God:
that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 JOHN 5:14, NIV

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE HAVING CHILDREN to test where our confidence lies, is there? Before my first daughter was born, my confidence in God felt unshakable. My joy was palpable.

Thank You for this baby, Lord! Please protect my baby as the pregnancy progresses. I am so excited to meet her!

When I was an expectant mother, the world didn't feel too big for my God. As with many other moms, my conversations with God centered around what I *anticipated* motherhood would bring. I asked God to calm my heart and assuage my fears about an upcoming birth. I asked for a smooth delivery and a healthy baby.

But after the baby's arrival, many of my conversations with God took place in the middle of the night as I tearfully confessed to an unexpected struggle—I often felt inadequate for the tremendous responsibility He had given to me. I worried if I would have the physical and emotional, let alone spiritual, endurance that I would need for the road ahead.

Lord? Are you listening? I'm so tired, Lord. I need Your help.

As the years go by, motherhood's changing seasons alter the nature of the way we pray. Our prayers may change, but God wants one thing to remain the same: He desires that our confidence be placed always in Him. He wants us to know that He is listening. Because as much as our hearts have invested in our children, God has even more invested. After all, He has planted eternity in their hearts (see Ecclesiastes 3:11).

As our children grow into their teen years and our gaze shifts to the edge of the parenting horizon, a new confidence in Him is required. Can you feel it, precious mom of teens? At sixteen, the harvest is close.

Oh Father, how I long to see my children walking in the truth. Protect their hearts. Draw them close.

I pray that my young trees will flourish and grow in righteousness—that they would be like the “cedars of Lebanon” that the prophet wrote about in Psalm 92:12.

Lord Jesus, help me to place my confidence in You. Remind me that You hear me, and help me to live out my life in a way that says, “I trust You.”

God understands the seasons of motherhood, precious one. No matter what season you are in, His heart is for you. Confidence in God is well placed. As your children grow, let your confidence in God grow with them.

Who Has Held You Back?

You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom.

GALATIANS 5:7-8

HAVE YOU EVER LOST MOMENTUM? I have. One minute, I'm cruising along, just killing it at this motherhood gig: dinner's in the slow cooker, homeschooling is all caught up, laundry's done. Okay—that was pushing it. Laundry is never done, and we all know it, right? But just about the time I'm ready to collect my motherhood medal, something happens, and I'm a mess, lying in the fetal position behind my closet door with a bag of Double Stuf Oreos.

Please tell me you understand.

When I fall off the mommy wagon, it's easy for me to look around in an effort to cast the blame somewhere, when most of the time, even discipline issues I'm struggling through with my kids can be traced back to . . . you guessed it . . . my own disobedience.

When I realize this, it's time to take a step back and hit the reset button. Maybe you're there now too. If you are, take a deep breath. God understands—even when that “momentum” you've lost has resulted in a departure from God's truth.

I love Paul's honest emotion in Galatians 5. You can almost hear the tone of a parent in his voice. *You were running the race so well! What happened?* And then, as if he knows the inner struggle we all face, he jumps in and says, *Hey. This is not God's fault. He has more for you!*

The world tries to drown out the truth of Scripture, but hear me, loved child of the living God—you must cling tightly to it. God's ways bring freedom with them. Freedom from worry. Freedom to rest. Freedom from the fear of failure. Freedom to cling tightly to the truth. Cling to it, precious mom—for in the Truth, you'll find the Life, also.

Jesus understands the weariness of the race, and through the apostle Paul, He gently says, *“I love you.”* Can you hear His voice, sweet mom? Can you hear Him above the noise of a busy household and the demands of motherhood? Lean in. He's here. He will help and encourage you to get back on the path He has set before you. His Word will be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (see Psalm 119:105).

Stay in His Word, and you'll stay on the path. Keep running the race! God is for you!