

# set-apart motherhood

REFLECTING **JOY** AND **BEAUTY**  
IN FAMILY LIFE

*Leslie Ludy*

Bestselling Author of *Authentic Beauty*



Of all the various titles I've held, none mean more than wife, mom, and Mimi to our twenty grandchildren. I'm grateful that God blessed Dennis and me with six souls to guide, shape, and point to Him. Leslie expertly does the same for the reader, guiding us to Him who controls all as we face the challenges and trials on this journey called motherhood.

**BARBARA RAINEY**

wife of Dennis Rainey, author, artist, and creator of Ever Thine Home

Moms don't need more frilly advice. They need real wisdom. Fortunately Leslie delivers this and so much more in *Set-Apart Motherhood*. She doesn't talk from a stuffy sofa in a professionally designed studio. She speaks from the heart of a woman who is dealing with soured milk in her van and spaghetti sauce on her carpet. Now *this* is a woman I want to listen to! Leslie has an art for bringing joy and peace to the most chaotic career in the world—motherhood.

**HANNAH KEELEY**

TV host, *Hannah, Help Me!*

Founder, Mom Mastery University



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*motherhood*

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— IN FAMILY LIFE —

*Leslie Ludy*

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PART ONE

# A VISION FOR SET-APART MOTHERHOOD

*Heavenly Perspective for the Sacred Call of Mothering*





CHAPTER ONE

# THE SACRED CALL OF SET-APART MOTHERHOOD

*Gaining God's Perspective on Raising Kids*



*Strength and honor are her clothing;  
She shall rejoice in time to come.*

PROVERBS 31:25

I AM A *REAL* MOM. My days are filled with moments that are oh-so-real-life, not to mention unglamorous and unromantic. Like the other day, when my youngest daughter threw up all over her car seat just as church was getting out. So right there on the sidewalk while everyone was walking past in their dress pants and high heels, my husband and I went through the tedious and rather embarrassing process of cleaning up the mess while trying to keep our kids' behavior in check as they ran wildly around the church lawn. We made quite a spectacle. We were an hour late for our family outing. Our kids were whining about being hungry and complaining about the smell in the car. And everyone was just a little

on edge, including Mommy. But once we finally got to our destination and ate lunch in the warm sunshine, it turned out to be a meaningful day being together as a family. It just took a little bit of battling to get to the beauty.

That's the way motherhood is for me. Battling through the daily challenges of mothering to discover the incredible beauty God has waiting for me on the other side. I have learned not to stop short and accept chaos as the norm, or resign myself to the attitude, "Motherhood will always be messy and frustrating." By God's grace, I have purposed not to settle for anything less than *His* pattern for motherhood—and His pattern is victorious, joy-filled, and beautiful.

I have been around countless moms who roll their eyes at the notion that motherhood can be beautiful. They laugh at the idea that there can be dignity in raising children. They scoff at the suggestion that a mom of small kids can be calm, well-groomed, and well-rested. They snicker at the idea that a home with young children can be clean, beautiful, and orderly.

Believe me, I understand where these sentiments come from. I understand how challenging it can be to experience beauty, order, and dignity in the midst of mothering little ones. Eric and I were married for nearly ten years before we had children. Then God in His providence (and divine sense of humor) blessed us with four kids in four years (via two adoptions and two biological children). Since we'd been in public ministry for most of our married life, we thought we were seasoned at handling challenges. But the pressures of

speaking in front of large crowds, meeting book deadlines, and leading a global ministry pale in comparison to the pressures of parenting four children. Three of our kids were in diapers at the same time, and the youngest two had only seven months between them due to an adoption and surprise pregnancy that happened simultaneously. Though we had a wonderful support system of people who helped us keep an orderly home during that season, there were still many moments of diaper blowouts, baby spit-up on the carpet, ear-splitting tantrums, chaos, and constant commotion . . . not unlike that scene from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, when the Whos down in Whoville are making all their “Noise! Noise! Noise!”

Now that my kids are a bit older (eight, six, five, and four at the time of writing this book), things are a little less chaotic in our home, and we have gotten past the diaper blowouts, for which I am thankful. But the noise level is about the same, as are the constant demands of raising four young children so close in age. My days are not filled with picturesque Pottery Barn Kids moments but with noisy, messy, and often extremely exasperating scenarios.

Case in point: Last week I spilled about half of a container of milk on the floor of our van. I don’t remember all the details of how it happened, but my guess is that I was unloading kids and groceries at the same time. As usual, I was attempting to carry way more than was humanly possible, while simultaneously mediating a squabble between my two youngest kids and trying to get my six-year-old to

stop decorating her white shirt with the pink sidewalk chalk she'd discovered on her way into the house. Consequently I spilled a large amount of milk all over the carpeted van floor. Which resulted in the smell of sour milk permeating our vehicle. Which resulted in kids whining and complaining about the smell every time they got in the car. Which resulted in me loading up all the kids the next morning and driving thirty minutes to the only car wash I knew that could shampoo car floor mats.

I unloaded four rowdy kids into the car wash parking lot, removed all of the car seats, and stashed all the random toys, books, and miscellaneous items into a duffle bag so the van would be clear for its thorough cleaning and the floor mats for a good washing. I hauled the kids, the car seats, and the duffle bag up the crowded sidewalk into the waiting area and got ready to pay for the car wash, making sure to mention that I wanted the carpets shampooed.

The sleepy college-aged guy at the counter then informed me that they had decided to stop doing carpet shampoos for the rest of the day, so all I could get would be the basic wash and vacuum. I'm not sure why they chose to stop shampooing carpets the moment I arrived, but I was convinced that they had made the decision for the express purpose of making my life more difficult.

"I just drove thirty minutes to have you shampoo the carpets," I protested. "Isn't there anything you can do to help me?"

"Well," he said in a distinctly nonhelpful tone, "why don't you just come back tomorrow?"

*Uh . . . come back tomorrow? Excuse me, buddy. You really don't understand my life. I'm a mom of four little kids! It's a huge ordeal to load them up and take an hour out of my day to get the van carpets shampooed. Don't you get it? I can't come back tomorrow. Tomorrow I have to take one kid to the doctor, another to speech lessons, and another to buy new tennis shoes because his current ones are so caked with mud that they have morphed from light blue to dark brown. I also have to fold five loads of laundry, or my kids will be going to school in their pajamas. And I have to go back to the grocery store because I forgot to buy paper towels. Not sure when I'm going to fit that in. My schedule is super full. I can't even tell you all the things on my to-do list! There's no way I can just drop everything and come back tomorrow to have you shampoo my van carpets, okay?*

Those were pretty much my exact thoughts, and I'm glad I did not voice them out loud. A perfectionist by nature, I like it when things flow smoothly. I am not a fan of inefficiency, such as multiple trips to the car wash in a twenty-four-hour period to clean up milk that should never have been spilled in the first place. But with kids, things don't always go like clockwork. All my carefully laid plans have a way of growing wings and flying out the window. When that happens, life as a mom can feel stressful and frustrating.

But once I got home and the kids and I went outside into the crisp fall air, we ended up having a fun afternoon building memories together. Somehow during those next few days, the van carpet got cleaned, the new tennis shoes got

purchased, most of the laundry got done, and (shockingly) we managed to survive for a while without paper towels. The saga of the spilled milk was soon forgotten, and it turned out to be a beautiful week full of great family milestones and memories, such as our youngest son finally learning to ride his bike without training wheels.

Motherhood is not easy and never will be. But I have discovered that motherhood can be marked by beauty, joy, and incredible fulfillment when I focus on Jesus Christ, instead of on all the inconveniences and struggles I face along the way.

## RISING ABOVE MEDIOCRITY

“Life with kids is chaos,” a mother of four once told me. “We might as well get used to it!”

“My kids have destroyed all semblance of order in my life. I can’t even remember what my house looks like clean or what it feels like to get a good night’s sleep,” a harried mother of three complained to me.

These are common thoughts among today’s moms. And I know from personal experience how tempting it can be to throw up our hands and jump on the “motherhood is chaos” bandwagon.

Mothering can be intensely frustrating and often feels futile. Being a mom disrupts every aspect of your life. Mothers have no downtime, no vacation from raising kids. We cannot take a break from our calling as mothers. It’s a job that requires us to be on call twenty-four hours a day,

seven days a week. There is little private time. (Many mornings when I take a shower, my four- and five-year-old stand outside the bathroom banging on the door and yelling for me to hurry up). And moms of small kids can't just clean the house every few days and expect it to stay that way. We have a team of little rascals working to *undo* all of our hard work around the house. They play with the laundry we just folded and dump all our makeup out of the drawer we just organized. They spill spaghetti sauce on freshly cleaned carpet and draw with marker on newly painted walls. Alas, I know these scenarios all too well.

In moments such as these, the voice of Despair whispers to my soul, *Your life is so chaotic. You might as well give up on expecting anything more. Don't even try. It's always going to be this way.*

Then the voice of Self-Pity chimes in: *Poor, poor you. No one understands how hard your life is. Raising four little kids is so stressful and difficult. Everyone else has it so easy, but you never get a break!*

My response to these voices is what leads to either victory or defeat in my mothering. If I entertain these lies, even for a moment, they take root in my soul and grow. Soon the whole day becomes chaotic and discouraging. I feel overwhelmed and exhausted, and my efforts to bring order and peace seem futile. The moment I resign myself to the "life with kids is chaos" attitude, I no longer have the energy to battle for beauty, order, and peace. I'm resigned to mediocrity.

But when I cry out to God for victory, He comes to my

rescue. He gives me the strength to resist the temptation to throw my hands up in despair or wallow in self-pity. He redeems a day that might otherwise have ended in discouragement and fills it with peace and joy. He calms my tumultuous emotions. He quiets my hyper children. He helps me find their missing shoes. He gives me wisdom for how to organize our routine so that leaving the house becomes smoother and easier. And He opens my eyes to see the sacred privilege He's given me—helping shape, nurture, and train four future world-changers.

God intends for mothers to experience amazing delight and fulfillment in raising children and running a home. That doesn't mean that raw and real-life moments won't happen or that every day will end like an episode of *Little House on the Prairie*. It simply means that when God is at the center of our mothering, there is beauty, order, peace, joy, honor, and dignity to be found, by His grace.

I don't believe mothers of young children are destined to constantly have peanut-butter handprints all over their walls and piles of dirty laundry all over the floor. I don't believe it is a mother's lot to wear sweats every day and never have time to put on makeup or dress with dignity. I don't believe moms have to be slaves to their children's emotional tirades and temper tantrums or wallow in exhaustion and despair. Though I have succumbed to each of these scenarios more than once over the past few years, I believe that God has something so much more for my motherhood than defeat and mediocrity.

Proverbs 31 describes what a set-apart mother looks like. She is an active and busy mom. But even with all the responsibilities she carries, she is not frenzied, frazzled, or frumpy. “Strength and dignity are her clothing,” and “she smiles at the future” and “looks well to the ways of her household” (Prov. 31:25,27, NASB). She dresses with beauty and dignity, provides for the needs of her household, seeks high-quality materials, and works eagerly with her hands to create beauty, order, peace, and security for those under her care. The Bible makes it clear that God’s pattern for godly motherhood leads to beauty, joy, dignity, honor, and strength. And this pattern is available to each of us when we submit every aspect of our motherhood to Him.

God desires to take an ordinary mom and transform her into a radiant, set-apart, “joyful mother of children” (Ps. 113:9). What an exciting promise!

I’ve never met a mother who feels like she’s doing everything perfectly. And that is a relief, because neither do I! We must always remember that being a good mother doesn’t mean being perfect. It means becoming dependent upon the only One who is. Whenever I lean fully and completely on Jesus Christ, He faithfully points me to *His* perfect pattern for motherhood, one situation at a time.

At its essence, set-apart motherhood is not about trying to impress people with our parenting skills but about humbly applying God’s Truth to every challenge we face as mothers. Set-apart motherhood means diligently seeking to become the mothers God has called us to be, one step at a time.

Our job is not to try to become supermoms or Proverbs 31 women in our own strength. Our job is to surrender to God without reserve and to trust Him with every detail of this heavenly calling. No matter how ill-equipped you may feel as a mother, God has a beautiful purpose for your motherhood role, and He desires you to be strong and prepared for this sacred task.

Remember, faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it (see 1 Thess. 5:24)!

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

### *Group Study and Discussion*

1. **Read Proverbs 31:10-31.** Why do many women struggle to believe that this picture of godly motherhood is possible in today's world? What makes it possible to live out this calling?
2. **Read Philippians 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16.** Have you ever seen a mother who embraces her calling with consistent joy? What did you notice about her attitude and the way she interacts with her kids? Is this an attitude that all mothers can have? How?
3. **Read Hebrews 12:1.** What does it mean to rise above mediocrity in our mothering? Where do we gain the strength to do so?

## TAKE IT DEEPER

### *Personal Study and Reflection*

**Read:** Proverbs 31:25-27

**Reflect:** Does this picture of motherhood seem unrealistic? If so, why? Do I believe that God desires to bring joy, beauty, and dignity to my motherhood role? Am I willing to pursue and expect this?

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

**Reflect:** How do I typically respond to stresses in motherhood—with thanksgiving and joy, or with despair and self-pity? In which areas is God asking me to adopt a heavenly perspective toward my role as a mother?

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:24

**Reflect:** What does it mean to rely on God's grace to become the kind of mother He has called me to be, rather than pursuing "parenting perfection"?

