

GLORIA FURMAN

Treasuring Christ

WHEN YOUR HANDS
ARE FULL



*Gospel Meditations
for Busy Moms*

STUDY GUIDE

Study Guide for

Treasuring Christ

WHEN YOUR HANDS ARE FULL

Gospel Meditations for Busy Moms

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Study Guide for Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full

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Introduction

“The Christian mother’s hands are full with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

“A mother’s work is never done,” the old saying goes. Much joy is found in the process of raising children, but we must admit that the joy is often tinged by frustration and exhaustion. The realities of motherhood can make us feel that we must shelve spiritual growth and the riches of God’s kingdom until we reach a different season of life. But that’s not the way it has to be. In fact, the very challenges inherent in motherhood are actually God’s instruments for bringing forth spiritual growth and kingdom riches.

REFLECTION

1. Gloria is frank about the suffering she and her husband, Dave, have experienced through Dave’s illness, yet the suffering has strengthened, not weakened, her faith, and the couple has been able to testify to the truth of Lamentations 3:22: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.” How does suffering, more than anything else, provide an opportunity to learn this truth?

2. Gloria writes, “God has used our family’s physical circumstances to point me to the one great permanent circumstance in my life—the gospel of Jesus Christ.” How does 2 Corinthians 1:3–6 explain how this is worked out in the lives of all who belong to God through Jesus Christ?

3. How do Ephesians 1:3–10 and 1 Peter 1:3–5 provide an eternal perspective on the ceaseless and sometimes monotonous tasks of motherhood?

4. Jonathan Edwards prayed, “Stamp eternity on my eyeballs.” How does cultivating an eternal perspective help with motherhood (see p. 18)?

5. Gloria writes that Jesus is our power to love God and our children. How does that work out in practical ways (see pp. 19–20)?

GOING DEEPER

No one gladly chooses suffering, but no one escapes it either. And when it comes, we have a choice. We can try to deny it or escape it or tough it out like a stoic, or we can turn to God in faith and trust his divine governing of the details of our lives. Denial or escape or stoicism are the defaults of mankind. It’s only through Scripture that we can learn how to profit from suffering. How do the following passages enable us to build a theology of suffering: Romans 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 12:7–10; 1 Peter 4:12–13; James 1:2–4?

Hands Full of Blessings

“Maintaining the perspective that God has abundantly blessed you is a very real struggle.”

In chapter 1, Gloria declares her thesis: “Because of the gospel—the news about what Jesus did on the cross to save sinners—mothers who make Christ their treasure can rejoice in their work as God works in them.” The gospel is powerful. It has power to transform our life because it first transforms our heart. As we grow in our understanding of what Christ did on the cross, we will find ourselves treasuring our Savior more fully, thereby putting everything else we value into more fruitful perspective.

REFLECTION

1. Gloria used to get irritated when people pointed out the obvious—her hands are full. The comment made her feel as though she wasn’t doing a good job as a mother. To what does Gloria attribute her reaction, and how has her perspective changed (pp. 26–27)? On which end of that spectrum would you place yourself today?

2. How would you answer Gloria’s question: “How does the gospel of Jesus Christ impact your life in a significant way when your seasonal reality seems to be absorbed by mundane things like bodily-fluid accidents and temper tantrums at the grocery store?” How does Gloria answer that question for her own life (p. 29)?

3. What perspective on motherhood can hinder our enjoyment of God? Conversely, what perspective enhances our enjoyment of both God and motherhood (p. 30)?

4. Gloria writes that the gifts God gives are meant to direct our praise to the giver of those gifts (p. 31). Do you view motherhood as a gift? Why or why not? How does your viewpoint impact your view of God?

5. God's goal in giving us children is to make us holy, which will eventually result in our glorification together with Christ. How does Romans 8:12–17 speak to you personally regarding your calling?

GOING DEEPER

Work your way through Galatians 5, noting concrete ways that Paul's instruction provides us with guidance in living out our motherhood "in Christ."

God Displays His Handiwork in the Maternal Instinct

Mothers would do just about anything to defend their children—so much so that a mother defending her child has been likened to a bear robbed of her cubs. That protectiveness is instinctual. But God has hardwired women with a capacity to nurture that far exceeds that of a bear or any other animal, and when a woman is united to Christ, mothering is transformational.

REFLECTION

1. How is a mother's instinct different from the instincts of the animal kingdom, and what is the redemptive goal for a mother's instinct?

2. What makes motherhood a reflection of God and the gospel (see p. 40)?

3. Abiding in Christ is essential for living out godly motherhood. What does John 15:1–11 teach us about the nature of abiding in Christ? What fruit is produced by abiding?

4. Gloria writes, “It’s true that other mothers can give you great advice on childcare and support your parenting decisions, but Christian sisters can give each other so much more” (p. 44). According to Ephesians 3:17–19 and 4:15–16, what does that “so much more” consist of?

5. A section of chapter 2 is titled “Pushing Back the Gates of Hell” (pp. 44–45). How are the sacrifices inherent in motherhood an opportunity to participate in this pushing back of hell?

GOING DEEPER

Christian mothers have a unique opportunity to encourage one another rather than compete. What specific instruction do we find in Ephesians 4:20–32 about *putting off* what divides and *putting on* what unites? We find similar language elsewhere in the New Testament. How do the following passages deepen your understanding of discipleship: Romans 8:12–13; Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1?

Mommy Brain

Are we preparing our children to be successful adults? Mothers so easily get caught on that concern, and if left unchecked, anxiety or discouragement can grow to dominate our hearts. The remedy is holding an eternal perspective, and we cultivate that through immersion in God's Word.

REFLECTION

1. Gloria defines *parental amnesia* as “forgetting about two things: tomorrow and eternity” (p. 50). What are the dangers of parental amnesia, and how can we avoid them?

2. How does having an eternal perspective reshape our hopes for our children (see pp. 54–55)? In turn, how does God use our children to remind us of eternity (p. 56)?

3. Gloria writes, “The greatest obstruction to our joy in God is not a lack of time” (p. 57). What does obstruct our joy, and how is this remedied?

4. Why is hope a vital component of a thriving faith (see Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Thess. 5:8–11; Heb. 10:19–23; 1 Pet. 1:3–9)?

5. In describing the blessings of faith, Gloria references the patriarch Abraham, about whom it is written: “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore” (Heb. 11:12). Read Hebrews 11 in its entirety and note specific ways your faith is strengthened by what you see.

GOING DEEPER

Cultivating an eternal perspective helps us avoid parental amnesia. Read the following psalms and for each one note how the psalmist “remembered” God and how his outlook changed as a result: Psalms 42; 63; 77; 105; 143.

Family Tradition #1: We Always Need God's Grace

“If we want to give grace to our children,
then first we must be willing to receive
it ourselves from God.

We set high standards—for our kids, our home, and our marriage. But what happens when we fail to meet the standards we set? Let's face it: we all fail to measure up. But this is precisely where the gospel meets us in practical ways. The good news of the gospel is grace for our failures. It's God's high standards that count, not ours, and in him we have all we lack.

REFLECTION

1. Gloria writes, “Mothers have a strategic role in allowing the gospel to shape their home by expecting that we are always in need of God's grace” (p. 63), and she goes on to pose a question to us: Do we need God's grace? We know the correct answer, but our response to daily pressures shows what we really believe. With that in mind, how would you answer?

2. What is the prerequisite for giving grace to our children (see p. 64)?

3. Gloria points out that the gospel should shape our home, including our family traditions. Discuss how you might incorporate this wisdom into your home and family life.

4. What are some ways you can model grace to your children? Give specific examples.

5. How does Hebrews 4:14–16 conquer “mommy guilt”? *“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

GOING DEEPER

“Salvation . . . means being united to Christ” (p. 66). Meditate on the following passages that pertain to being “in Christ” and note what you discover: Romans 3:21–24; 6:11, 23; 8:1–2, 38–39; 1 Corinthians 1:28–30; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Galatians 3:25; Ephesians 2:4–10.

A Mother's "Call to Worship"

Time alone for spiritual refreshment—what Christian mother doesn't yearn for more of that? Sometimes we fear that spiritual growth must go on hold until the next season of life. But God is so much bigger than that! He is always at work in our lives—even when it seems that all is chaos.

REFLECTION

1. Finding solitude to commune with God is a challenge for mothers. Gloria has experienced this struggle. How has 2 Corinthians 9:8 helped her (see p. 74)?

2. Repeated interruptions throughout the day can wear us down. Before we know it, we're irritable, frustrated, and snapping at the kids. Realizing two truths has helped Gloria know peace rather than frustration: God's sovereignty and Jesus's name "Immanuel," which means "God with us." How do these truths equip us to roll peacefully with the punches?

3. How can everyday ordeals serve as "calls to worship"? Gloria gives some examples (pp. 76–77). Discuss some recent instances from your own life that could have been worship opportunities.

4. Jesus promises that fullness of joy is available for all his daughters. Do you believe this can be true for you, even in the midst of mothering chaos? Gloria encourages us to respond to Jesus's invitation in John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." How would you summarize the "these things" Jesus spoke of (see vv. 1–10)?

5. God magnifies his strength through weakness (see Ps. 8:2 and 1 Cor. 1:27). How does this knowledge help us respond with grace to chronic inconveniences?

GOING DEEPER

Time is precious, and we can so easily panic when our hours get swallowed up in activities that seem trivial and unending. How does Psalm 139 alter your thinking not only about your time but also about those activities that seem so trivial?

A Mother's Love

“No mother’s nightmarish valley is so dark that Jesus cannot bear her burdens the whole way through,” Gloria reminds us. It is the love of Christ that gives us hope. It’s his love that enables us to persevere. And because of his love for us—and through that love—mothers can love and raise their children to the glory of God.

REFLECTION

1. When it comes to training our kids, we tend to default to behavior modification before leaning on Christ. Why do you think this is? How does placing our trust in Christ work to alter our default?

2. Because every waking hour of a mother’s life is about serving others, motherhood is a humble calling. Gloria directs us to Philippians 2, where the apostle Paul points to Christ as our example of humble service. Read Philippians 2:3–11. How does this passage alter your perspective on mothering?

3. There are times when we fume at our children not because they break God’s law but because they break ours. What underlies our cravings to control (see pp. 88–89)?

4. Gloria confesses her temptation to make idols of her children (p. 92). In what ways do you tend to idolize your kids or your child-raising techniques? How can moms be freed from seeking the self-glory that underlies the idols of motherhood?

5. Why is weakness a key component of mothering to the glory of God (see 2 Cor. 12:2–10)?

GOING DEEPER

Gloria's view of motherhood has been shaped in part by reading about the life of missionary David Livingstone, and she has found encouragement in the words of a speech he delivered at Cambridge University in 1857. If you Google "David Livingstone," you'll find his speech in its entirety, as well as other resources pertaining to his life. Peruse some of these resources and see how they impact your own view of motherhood.

Mommy Doesn't Always Know Best

“Theology is where practicality begins,” Gloria writes. But faced with countless decisions and problems to solve, we kick in to crisis-control mode and simply check things off the to-do list. Yet no matter how skilled we are at problem solving, we get up and repeat the pattern the very next day. More than how-to’s and checklists, our greatest need is to shift our focus upward and develop the sort of wisdom that comes only from depending on God.

REFLECTION

1. Mothers can feel burdened by the sheer volume of decisions that must be made on a daily basis, but the primary decision of each day is to fear the Lord. What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? Develop your answer from Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; and Proverbs 1:1–7; 8:13; 9:10–11. To what does the fear of the Lord lead?

2. Why do we all lack wisdom (see p. 98)? Where in your life do you find yourself relating to the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:18: “*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out*”?

3. Gloria writes, “Until Christ be sweet, sin will not be bitter.” How does that sense of sweetness come about in our hearts (see pp. 98–99)?

4. Gloria cautions, “Spiritual counsel that has ‘empty calories’ or is devoid of rich, biblical doctrine cannot and will not satisfy a soul that was made to be satisfied only with an infinite God.” Can you identify any spiritual “junk food” that you’ve partaken of recently? How do we distinguish between that and spiritually nutritious counsel?

5. What do we see about Jesus in the following passages that supplies what we so often seek in ourselves or in what this world offers: Isaiah 55:1–3; Matthew 11:28–29; and 1 Corinthians 1:20–31?

GOING DEEPER

Do you crave God’s Word? To cultivate a deeper love for Scripture, prayerfully read through Psalm 119, an acrostic poem about Scripture. What do you find in this psalm that makes you want more of it? Take special note of the verses that reference “wholeheartedness.”

The Good News and Mommy's No-Good, Very Bad Day

“There are no perfect moms,” Gloria admits, “but we’ll die trying to prove we might be the exception.” Is Gloria’s admission your own as well? If so, you likely know the accompanying feeling of being overwhelmed much of the time. But perfectionist spirit aside, mothering is just plain overwhelming at times. That’s why Gloria asks us to consider this: “What is our hope when a deluge of domestic frustrations threatens to sweep us away into the sea of despondency?” There is hope—not just for some future season of life, but right now.

REFLECTION

1. We are all tempted to believe the lie that how well a day goes is a measure of how God feels about us. How does Romans 8:28–39 debunk that lie?

2. How does God use frustrating circumstances to grow us spiritually (see p. 107)?

3. What does it mean that Christ is our righteousness (see Rom. 3:9–31)? How do Paul’s words in Romans liberate us in our mothering?

4. Getting the kids to bed is an ongoing challenge for Gloria. Perhaps you can relate! What perspective has Gloria learned that enables her to face bedtime with peace (see pp. 110–13)?

5. Gloria points out that there are times when believers don't feel particularly close to God (p. 112). What reality contradicts those feelings? Review Romans 8:31–39; Ephesians 1:13–14; and 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

GOING DEEPER

Gloria references Jerry Bridges's book *The Disciplines of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (new edition, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006). It's a good resource for mothers who struggle with the sin of perfectionism. Studying it with a group of mothers would be an excellent way to follow up your study of *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*.

The Fictitious Mother of the Year

“What mother isn’t plagued by her feelings of inadequacy and guilt over her mistakes?”

Many mothers are plagued by feelings of inadequacy and guilt over their mistakes. Feelings of insecurity can lead us to act unkindly and to try to cover up our weaknesses, but that only compounds our guilt. The good news is that God doesn’t cover up our flaws—he actually covers them, and he does so completely by the blood of Christ. Then he redeems our failures for his glory.

REFLECTION

1. We all have a tendency to use our children “to bloat our egos and make us look good” (p. 116). In what particular ways is this a temptation for you?

2. The fear of man is a very real danger. Living in its grip can impact both our children and our enjoyment of God’s fellowship. What underlies our pull toward the fear of man (see Prov. 29:25 and Jer. 17:5–8)?

3. Gloria says that “our dirtiest laundry has already been aired” (p. 118). How, according to Isaiah 61:10, can admitting the truth of our sin actually lead us to rejoice?

4. Chapter 9 focuses on our justification in Christ. What exactly does *justification* mean? What are some of the ways it can impact both our mothering and how we view ourselves?

5. Grace is greater than pride, but pride so often rules us. Where does pride tend to show up in our lives? How can we humble our heart and thoughts to allow grace to permeate and conquer our pride? Use the Scripture references quoted in the chapter as the basis for your answer and then apply those truths specifically to your life.

6. Gloria gives us a list of questions to ask ourselves (pp. 122–23). How would you answer these questions today?

GOING DEEPER

“Guilt is a terrible motivator, and guilt never strengthened anyone’s heart,” writes Gloria (p. 124). What insights into our guilt do we get from the prophet Zechariah’s vision (Zech. 3:1–5)? How does Ephesians 6:10–20 serve as a practical follow-up to what we learn from Zechariah’s vision?

4. The apostle Peter instructs us about Christian service, whether done in the home or the church: “*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*” (1 Pet. 4:10–11). According to Peter, how are we to serve, and what is the ultimate purpose of all our service?

5. What encouragement to persevere through the difficult aspects of motherhood is offered in 1 Corinthians 15:58 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11? In each verse we are both instructed and freed. How?

GOING DEEPER

Gloria says that Psalm 71 “*lauds the Lord as the one who saves us in his righteousness and is to us a rock of refuge.*” Work through the psalm and note all of the following:

- The psalmist’s concerns. What is causing him trouble?
- The psalmist’s petitions. What does he ask God to do?
- The psalmist’s commitments. What does he vow to do?
- The psalmist’s reasons for trust. What attributes of God does he put forth?

The Metanarrative of Motherhood

If being a mom is a gift, then why does the true blessedness of motherhood elicit in us such skepticism? The overarching reason, Gloria says, is sin. Our sin skews our perspective and focuses us inward rather than outward and upward. But skepticism drowns under the flood of God's grace and mercy as we view our calling through the lens of Scripture.

REFLECTION

1. What we fixate on can shape the course of our life, which is why God's Word calls us to govern our thoughts. Read Romans 12:1–2. What contrast is set for us in this passage? How are we transformed and renewed, and for what purposes?

2. Gloria writes, "The highest aim of womanhood is not motherhood; the highest aim of womanhood is being conformed to the image of Christ." What happens when we seek to define ourselves by our motherhood? How have you experienced the reality of this in your own life?

3. In Genesis, God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (1:28), but then sin entered in, and death became a fact of life. Yet there is mercy! How is mercy revealed in the curse God pronounced against the Serpent (3:15) (see. pp. 140–42)?

4. The apostle Peter writes, “*In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Pet. 3:15). How does heeding Peter’s instruction breed satisfaction (see p. 144)?

5. What does Gloria reveal as the overarching purpose of motherhood (see pp. 145–46)? How does this purpose alter your outlook on the daily aspects of parenting?

GOING DEEPER

Motherhood is meant to direct our hearts to worship. Gloria references the opening of Psalm 145 in this chapter. Study the psalm and list everything the Lord is praised for.

4. What perspective transforms apathy and frustration (see Ps. 8:3–6; Eph. 1:22; and Col. 1:16)?

5. The prophet Jeremiah found hope in the midst of a frightening crisis, and his words of hope are recorded in Lamentations 3:21–24:

*But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”*

What specific things do you see in this passage that led to Jeremiah’s hope?

GOING DEEPER

Study the prayers of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:16–20 and 3:14–19. List the petitions in Paul’s prayers. How do they differ from your regular petitions? Cultivate a habit of praying one or more of these petitions each day before you ask God to supply your temporal needs.