

# A Mom After God's Own Heart

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Portions of *A Mom After God's Own Heart Growth and Study Guide* have been added to this edition of *A Mom After God's Own Heart*.

## **A Mom After God's Own Heart**

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TRAINING CHILDREN  
FOR GOD...  
AND FOR LIFE



*Ten Ways to Love Your Children*

# Take Time to Nurture Your Heart

*And these words  
which I command you today  
shall be in your heart.*

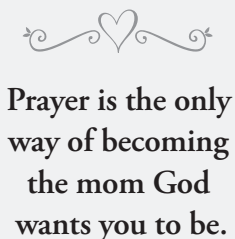
DEUTERONOMY 6:6

God has blessed Jim and me with two wonderful daughters—Katherine and Courtney—who, to date, have been married 10 and 11 years respectively. And now they are seeking to be moms after God’s own heart to the seven little ones they have between them. As they continually tell me, “Mom, it’s payback time. For everything we dished out to you, we’re getting it right back!”

When Courtney was expecting one of her children, our church in Washington hosted a baby shower for her, and our pastor’s wife asked me to share a devotional during the party. It was then, when I sat down to prepare something for the shower talk, that I wrote out a brief bare-bones list I entitled

“Ten Ways to Love Your Children.” Believe me, it was a soul-searching exercise to go cover to cover through my Bible and look back at my own attempts at child-raising. And it was a lot of fun at the shower to pass my list on to the other mothers and grandmothers, who were at every age and stage in the parenting process.

Then several years later, my list of ten child-raising principles made its way into one of my books as I wrote about being a mom in a particular chapter.<sup>1</sup> And in time, as I began to speak and share these parenting practices and interact with more and more moms and grandmoms, God planted a desire in my heart to expand them into a book to (I hope and pray!) help moms like you.



**Prayer is the only  
way of becoming  
the mom God  
wants you to be.**

So here they are—ten ways to be a mom after God's own heart, also known as “Ten Ways to Love Your Children.” As we go along, I want to ask you to do three things. First, please pray. And second, please open your heart to the scriptures presented in this book. They are God's instruction for mothers—from His heart to

ours. Third, if you want to know more about being a mom after God's own heart, the additional questions in the Growth and Study Guide will take you through even more of what God has to say on this vital subject.

Dear reader, the Holy Spirit will use and empower God's Word to teach you and transform you into a mom after God's own heart. After all, your heart is where raising a child after God's own heart begins. So obviously, the first way to love your children is to take time to nurture your heart.

## **It's All About Your Heart**

Imagine this scene. God's people have at last arrived at the borders of the Promised Land, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3). They are gathered together for a time of preparation and instruction before crossing the Jordan River to enter their new homeland. It was then and there that their faithful leader, Moses, gave them a second recitation and review of the law of God. At the core of Moses' heart was a concern for the generations to come—generations who were not present when God initially gave His law to His people. Moses knew it was critical that those present pass on their knowledge of God's law and the history of His dealings with the Israelites to their children. Hear now Moses' words—and his heart—from Deuteronomy 6:4-12. They contain major instructions to us as parents today.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

12 ...lest you forget the LORD.

Did you notice how many times God used the words “you” and “your” in these verses that make up a call from God to a total commitment to Him? Be sure to count them for yourself, but after several tries, I came up with 21 times. Twenty-one! These repeated personal pronouns make it obvious that God’s message to your heart is that you are to center your life on the Lord. In other words, being a woman—and a mom—after God’s own heart is all about *you* and *your heart*. (I hope this is sounding a little familiar!)

A quick walk-through of these verses reveals what God has in mind for His moms...and for you.

*Verse 4*—“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” These words began the *Shema*, the Jewish “confession of faith” in the one and only true God. “It is the heart principle of all the covenant stipulations.”<sup>2</sup> Today—as it was then—there are those who put their trust in different “gods.” Exactly where is your trust? Your heart? Your commitment? I hope it’s to the God of the Bible!

*Verse 5*—“You shall love the LORD your God.” Here God calls you to love Him with an unreserved, wholehearted commitment of love, a love that includes “*all* your heart...*all* your soul and...*all* your strength.” This love is to be an entire, all-consuming “sacred fire”<sup>4</sup> that causes all of your life to reach toward God.



*Verse 6*—Why is it important that “these words” that make up a part of the law of God be in a mother’s heart? Because God knows that when His Word and teachings reside in a person’s heart, that person can then think upon them, meditate on them, understand them...and obey them, which is the end result desired of every person (and mom!) after God’s own heart.

*Verse 7*—Once God’s Word and instructions are in your heart, you can then pass them on and “teach them diligently to your children.” You can place God and His Scriptures at the heart of the conversations in your home and throughout each day as you “talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

*Verse 8*—The instruction of this verse is saying that it’s good to be actively meditating on the commandments of God at all times. You can never forget or get away from something that is as near to you as a “sign on your hand” and “between your eyes.”

*Verse 9*—You are to do whatever it takes to make the Scriptures familiar to your heart and to your children...even if it means you “write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

*Verse 12*—Why all of this attention to having your heart filled with God’s instructions and purposefully passing it on to your children? God said through Moses it is “lest you forget the LORD.” God forbid that we or our children—our “heritage from the LORD” and His “reward” (Psalm 127:3)—should forget the Lord! God’s Word in your heart will keep you from forgetting God—from forgetting your dependence upon Him, from forgetting

your need of Him, and from forgetting your obligations to Him and to your children.

## **Taking Care of Business**

Dear mom, are you hearing God's message? Before we can even get to mothering and training our dear, precious children, we need to take care of business with God. We need to take care of our own hearts. We need to take time to nurture our hearts. You see, *we* are to love the Lord. And *we* are to love and obey His Word. His Word is to reside in *our* hearts. It really is all about us as moms and our hearts.

And what will happen (by God's grace) if our hearts are dedicated to God? What will happen if our hearts are filled with love for the Lord and with His instruction? We will be godly mothers. And then...*then!*...we can more successfully teach God's Word to our children. Complete devotion to the Lord must first be in the heart of the mother—in your heart and my heart. And then our godly training of our children and our diligent teaching of God's Word will follow.

I like the way one scholar summed up Deuteronomy 6:4-9 for us: "We are to love God, think constantly about his commandments, teach his commandments to our children, and live each day by the guidelines in his Word."<sup>5</sup>

## **Let the Transformation Begin!**

My girls are 13 months apart, which means that during their at-home years, I often felt like I had twins! So I had to really be on my toes because there would be little-or-no catching of the mistakes I made on the first child so they weren't repeated on the second one. What I was—or wasn't—doing to love and raise my children was being done to both of them at the same time.

So early on I realized the importance of getting God's powerful Word into my heart each day. I tasted the powerful effect it had on my parenting and on the atmosphere in our home. And the same is true for you. What happens to us moms when we don't take time to nurture our hearts? Here's my list. I found myself...

...running on empty. And when we're spiritually running on empty, our hearts are hollow and numb. Without spiritual refueling, our parenting is empty and the evidences of our apathy creep into our children's lives. All becomes dull and devoid of spiritual energy, purpose, motivation, and accomplishment in both parent and child.

...heartless. If we are heartless, our parenting becomes heartless and rote. We unconsciously put ourselves and our child-raising on autopilot. We find ourselves giving in and giving up the fight for godly standards and behavior. We begin putting up with things the way they are. We fail to make the effort to see that we live out God's calling to be moms after Him. We fail to make sure our children's hearts are being continually molded heavenward.

...worldly. If we are preoccupied with the things of this world and enamored by earthly pursuits and rewards, our parenting will be worldly. We won't be following God's criteria and God's ways. We'll be walking and parenting in the ways of the world. We'll slip up on holding the line on conduct and

choices and discipline. The things of this world will creep into our homes and into our children's hearts.

...carnal or unspiritual. If we are fulfilling the lust of the flesh instead of walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), our parenting will show it. As Paul points out, "the works of the flesh are *evident*" (verse 19). There will be screaming, yelling, belittling, name-calling, maybe even the slapping or shaking or pushing of children around.

This is all serious stuff...all brought about because the goodness of God's Word is not regularly refreshing and reminding us of Christ's better ways. God's solution? Pick up the Bible and read it. When we do, God touches and transforms our hearts into those of moms after His heart.

## Strength for Each Stretching Day

Recently my Courtney had Baby #4, our beautiful little Grace. Jim and I were there at Courtney's home in Connecticut on baby-watch duty when she and Paul left in the middle of the night for the hospital. We stayed about ten days afterward to help out and ease the usual adjustments of a busy household to a new baby.

I carry one very special memory with me...Each day at breakfast Courtney sat and ate with (and tended to) her five-, four-, and two-year-olds, and Jim and me. (In case it hasn't sunk in yet, that's six people for breakfast...not to mention a baby in a bassinet!) Beside her place mat was her beat-up, well-worn *One Year Bible*.<sup>6</sup> And later, after the dishes were cleared away, the kitchen cleaned up, faces and hands wiped, and the little ones sent on to their next activities, Courtney sat down again at the

breakfast table, by herself, with a large glass of water...and read her Bible.

Now I ask you, how does a mom handle each stretching day? How does she manage, in a God-pleasing way, her marriage, her housework, the first baby, the second baby, the third baby, and the fourth baby...all of whom quickly become active toddlers and preschoolers? Answer: She looks to God's empowering—and peace-producing!—Word. And doing so makes a difference—a huge difference!

I don't know how other mothers manage to fit in their daily Bible time, but this is how one mom does it as near to every day as she can. It's a powerful habit every mom can build into her life.



**The degree of our spiritual strength will be in direct proportion to the time we spend in God's Word.**

## ————— Heart Response —————

What does it take to read through the *One Year Bible*—or any Bible? It takes about 10 to 12 minutes a day. That's roughly the same time as a quick internet session. That's one-half of a good conversation on the phone with your sister, mom, or best friend. That's one-third of a sitcom on TV. That's one-sixth of a television talk show.

But with an earnest, hungry heart, you rise up from those dozen minutes in the Word filled. You are enthused (from *entheos*, meaning *inspired in or from God*) instead of heartless and apathetic. You have set aside worldliness and instead set your mind

and heart on things above “where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God...not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). And God’s spiritual “fruit of the Spirit”—His “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23)—is evident.



**For top  
performance,  
refuel daily from  
God’s Word.**

Remember, God’s Word makes all the difference in the world in your heart, in your day, and in your parenting. This handful of minutes is such a tiny investment to make in something that produces such massive daily—and eternal—dividends!

The excellent and godly mother in Proverbs 31:10-31 rose up each day to tend to the fire of the house (verse 15)...and to the “sacred fire” of her heart (verse 30). Won’t you do the same? It’s a little choice that will reap big benefits...both in your heart and in the hearts of your children. It will accelerate you down the path to being a more dedicated mother after God’s own heart.



## From a Dad's Heart

I think you can see the foundational importance of this chapter when it comes to being a mom after God's own heart. You cannot effectively impart to your children what you do not possess yourself. And what better possession is there to pass on to your children than your own heart and passion for God?

And you can make a difference even if your husband isn't a Christian! No matter how little support you receive from him, you can still mark your children for life and eternity. Why can I confidently say this? Because my mother did just that in my life. My father was not a Christian, nor was he interested in spiritual things. But my mother faithfully instilled God's principles into my life.

I can still picture my mom with her open Bible on the kitchen table. Each day she would sit down for a few minutes between her duties and read, study, and pray. And she always talked to me about what she was reading, even up until our last talk here on earth several years ago. She also read Bible stories to me when I was a little boy underfoot. It was during one of these casual talk-times that she introduced me to Jesus Christ as Savior. She took me to church several times a week. It wasn't easy, but she passed on to me what was most precious to her—a love for Jesus.

If you are reading this book and, like my mother, are having to do most, if not all, of the spiritual training of your children by yourself, don't be discouraged. And also don't use your difficult situation as an excuse. Raising your children is too important an assignment from God. Make sure you are growing spiritually yourself, so that you can be a spiritual model for your children.

Or, if you are reading along and your husband is involved in the spiritual training of your children, be sure you don't let or expect him to do it all. Your children need not only a dad after God's own heart, but they also need a mom after God's own heart. You can never give your kids too much spiritual input. Let them know how important God is to you.

My life is a living testimony to a mom who took the time to nurture her heart. And with an abundant love for Jesus overflowing from her heart, she nurtured my heart, so that today and any day I have an opportunity, I rise up and call her blessed (Proverbs 31:28).





## Little Choices That Reap Big Blessings

### *1. Read your Bible every day.*

When you do, you'll hear God's voice and His personal and direct instructions to you. The Bible is the ultimate book on parenting, and as you look to it for help, you'll find the words of Isaiah 30:21 to be true: "This is the way, walk in it." God's Word will guide you each step of the way through each day.

Is your husband gone a lot (or unreachable when a crisis occurs)? Or is he by choice uninvolved in the Child-Raising Department? Or too busy? Every mother experiences one—or all—of these scenarios at some time in her mothering career. But when they occur, God's sure, faithful, error-proof Word of instruction is always there to help you know exactly what to do. Just read it—even for ten minutes a day—and your knowledge will multiply so rapidly you'll surprise yourself by how quickly and thoroughly you learn to handle mothering God's way!

(To help you with this little choice that reaps the biggest of all blessings, I've included a "Quiet Times Calendar" in the back of your book for marking the days you read your Bible. You'll be encouraged as you look it over and see all the boxes you've marked.)

## *2. Learn from the parents in the Bible.*

As you read your Bible, you'll find examples of parents and parenting methods—both good (for instance, Hannah and Mary and Joseph) and bad (Eli and Isaac and Rebekah). Through them you can learn what to do...and what not to do...as a mom and a parent. Try to jot down what you are learning in the form of a principle. (For example, regarding Isaac and Rebekah, the principle could be simply stated, "Never show favoritism.") These biblical principles will guide you through the years.

## *3. Start saying no.*

God's Word empowers you when you read it and gives you the strength you need to be a loving-but-firm parent. It's tough to stand up to pressure and say *no* to the world, to others, to your child. It's also hard to say *no* to yourself and your flesh and get up early, stay up late, and go into action in the middle of the night when there's a need (all of which are required of a mom!). That's when strength is absolutely necessary—spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical strength.

Dear faithful mom, God's strength comes to your rescue at just such times to energize you to follow through on whatever you must do to follow His will. All of your parenting will benefit from the strength you draw from God to say *no* to what does not honor Him or benefit your children.

## *4. Cherish the good times.*

Faithful parenting is challenging work. But it is truly a

“labor of love” and certainly a choice that reaps the greatest blessings of all to a mom’s heart.

And I admit, sometimes it seems like you’ll never get a break, that you’ll never make it, that you’re going to lose it, that there is no hope and no end in sight, that things seem to be getting worse instead of better. That’s why you need to take notice of those peaceful, idyllic pockets and moments of joy and goodness that happen along during your days. You know, those times when all things are well, when things are going the way you—and the Lord—want them to go, when the children are charming, delightful, cheerful, and loving.

Thank God profusely for these good times. Cherish them in your heart-of-hearts. Enjoy them to the hilt. And remember them forever by recording them in a special notebook, album, or memory book. Doing so will give you something to return to over and over again when you need to see some light and remember some good times. Remembering the good times will keep you going for days on end when you are tempted to wonder if being a mom is worth the struggle. Recalling them will turn your heart into a fountain of joy...which, in turn, will refresh your days and your commitment to God’s job assignment to you to “train up” your children for Him.

### *5. Refuse to give up.*

Burn this “little choice” into your heart, mind, and muscles! Even when there’s no one else—no husband, mother or mother-in-law, sisters, support group, friends,

or mentors—to help you or tell you that you are doing the right thing, that you are doing a good job, God shouts forth His “Well done, good and faithful mom” through His Word (Matthew 25:21). When you take time to nurture your heart in God’s Word, you receive—directly from God!—the encouragement you need to keep on keeping on in your parenting.