

LIFT YOUR EYES

W H I T N E Y N E W B Y



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*For women who long to know, love, trust,
and obey Christ on the journey of motherhood:*

*"Those who look to him are radiant, and
their faces shall never be ashamed."*

PSALM 34:5

*And for Liam, Lanie, Bear, and Beckham:
You have spurred me to lift my eyes to our good
and glorious Shepherd as I seek to shepherd
your hearts. I pray you'll trust and treasure him
who keeps you now and forever.*





*To mothers who are weary and need rest;
to all who mourn and long for comfort;
to all who feel worthless and wonder if God cares;
to all who fail and desire strength;
to all who sin and need a Savior;
to all who hunger and thirst for righteousness;
and to whoever will listen—
may the words of this book offer encouragement
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.¹*



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Foreword

SALLY CLARKSON

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

MATTHEW 7:24-25

When I was a young single missionary living in Austria, one of my favorite retreats was a village in the lake district in the Austrian Alps. Hallstatt is a thousand-year-old town tucked between a towering mountainside and a deep lake. To get there, I had to take a train from Vienna. I would step off the train onto a small platform standing all by itself on the other side of the lake, then walk a few steps to a dock where a boat would take me the rest of the way to Hallstatt. As I stood at the back of the tiny boat, with the soft spray of the lake blowing in my face, I always noticed the remains of a small rock castle built on the side of the mountain.

One weekend I had taken my mother and a friend to visit this favorite retreat. We dined on a lovely deck outside our quaint hotel, which fronted the water, then retired to our rooms. Within an hour, however, a ferocious storm engulfed the whole area. The electricity in

the town suddenly went off. We looked out our third-story windows and saw, in the darkness, that the deck where we had recently eaten was now flooded with violent, tossing waves.

As we peered fearfully across the lake, everything seemed to be moving sideways and up and down. The high winds were blowing the torrents of rain sideways, the trees were bent over, and everything seemed to be caught up in the violence of the storm. An enormous flash of lightning illuminated the black sky. And suddenly I saw the outline of the stone castle, standing constant amid a storm that was shaking everything else to its core.

I have never forgotten the sense of strength and solidity I felt, gazing at that old structure that had not been daunted by centuries of such storms. It has become to me a picture of what God has created a home to be.

Women are created to be home builders, (“The wisest of women builds her house,” Proverbs 14:1). But the reality is, so many storms come our way, trying to destroy our homes and tear them apart.

A faithful mom is not someone who is perfect in following all her ideals, but one who is willing to believe that God is good, to believe his Word and that he will help us through all the ups and downs. A mama who puts one foot in front of the other day after day, year after year.

The habit of coming to God every day, seeking him, to listen and ponder his ways and engage in his truth, is the most profound action that will shape a mother’s life and the life of her children who are observing her ways.

I hardly need to say I was not perfect. Stressful crisis seasons kept me from this habit at times. Yet reading God’s Word and praying was essential to my ability to continue taking one more step in the direction of my own ideals—the fuel for my strength when life was exhausting.

If I am serious about God, I must be serious about investing in him and his Word. Others need the truth he teaches me.

More voices and messages invade the sound waves of our brains today than ever. Living in a melting pot of cultures, where all religions, values, and morals drift together and are said to be equal; where all varieties of moral behavior are validated and find acceptance; where television, film, and the internet smudge the clear borders of truth every day, means the call to teach children has never been more profoundly necessary.

In my own journey as a mama, I needed the wisdom and insight of other women who had gone before me. I longed to be understood as well as coached by other wise companions who were in the journey as well.

When I had the privilege of reading Whitney's book, I knew immediately that her stories and admonitions would be such an encouragement to so many women who long for inspiration and companionship in their lives as moms. She writes her own stories so personally that we feel like we are with her in her everyday life, but she then always points us to God and his Word to give us strength to hold on to. She harkens back to the foundation upon which we can build our homes. We need the infusion of inspiration while also needing to feel understood by those who have walked this demanding role of motherhood before us.

Whitney comes alongside us as a friend who has learned the secret of building her own life, her own house, on the strength and shelter of God's Word. In each page, you will feel understood. Yet, you will also leave having hope that God sees you, loves you, and will walk with you in each experience and trial of your life. I know that many will be held by these words. And you will sense that you can walk confidently through the myriad demanding details of a mother's life, but with hope, the companionship of God, and wisdom to follow his ways.



Introduction

On a crisp October day in 2012, we brought our first baby home from the hospital. As I cradled him in my arms, I was overcome with a flood of emotions—wonder, adoration, and a nagging sense of trepidation. The weight of my responsibilities as a brand-new mom felt almost crushing. I couldn't help but wonder about my baby's future: Would he learn to breastfeed and sleep through the night? Would he develop as he should? Would he grow to be kind and respectful? Would he break my heart? My thoughts quickly turned inward, and I felt vulnerable and uncertain. As I gazed at my little one, I was hopelessly in love, but I also felt weak, hormonal, and already exhausted. I knew the journey ahead would be the greatest adventure of my life, but at the time, the questions I had about my ability to mother him seemed to outweigh all the others. How would I know what to do when he started crying? Would we be able to bond? Did I have what it takes to be the mom he deserves?

Now, over a decade into mothering, I still face questions. Although I learned to meet my babies' needs and to survive on less sleep, I am still often overwhelmed by the job of shepherding the lives of my four young children. When the needs of motherhood press in on me, it isn't always my first inclination to lift my eyes to Christ. Instead, I tend to gaze at the "hills" of motherhood: never-ending mountains of laundry, toddler tantrums, fears about the future, and the weight of comparison. But when we fix our eyes on the needs right in front of us, we forget that our God stands ready to help. We forget that he is as close as our shadow (Psalm 121:5). I am writing this book in real time as a mother who is daily learning what it means to lift my eyes to Christ—and not only my eyes, but my heart, my voice, and every part of my being. By doing so, I remind myself that he is with me, he is for me, and he will keep me every step of the way.

The writers of the Psalms understood our natural human inclination to fret and worry. In Psalm 121, the psalmist sings, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?" He immediately answers his own question by singing in the face of his fears: "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (verses 1-2).

Psalm 121 is part of a collection of 15 psalms called the Songs of Ascent that Jewish pilgrims traditionally sang while traveling the uphill road to Jerusalem to attend three annual festivals in the temple (Exodus 23:14-19). They sang these songs as a prayer of protection as they crossed a steep, narrow path filled with potential dangers that loomed in the hills. But these pilgrim songs weren't only intended for the rocky road to Jerusalem; the songs shaped their spiritual journey as well. These pilgrims were traveling to the very presence of God, who dwelled in the temple on Mount Zion.

So what does this have to do with mothers?

On our parenting journey, we often find ourselves stretched thin and feeling weak. Few things expose our need for a Helper as

profoundly as motherhood. Those hard days lead us to ask, “Will God really provide everything I need? Is he enough?” And what we need—more than a fresh cup of coffee, an hour alone, or more sleep—is to know the Source of our help. We need his living Word to shape our perspective, remind us of our identity, and equip us for the holy work before us. We need *him*.

Each of the eight verses of Psalm 121 reveals an aspect of God’s character. Using this psalm as a framework, we will learn how to “lift our eyes” from the daily realities of motherhood to the steadfast love of the Lord. Each of the eight sections of this devotional begins with a short commentary about one of God’s attributes seen in the text, followed by five devotions intended to meet you in your everyday circumstances. And when we realize that all of Scripture is ultimately about Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39), we will see that Jesus is the fulfillment of this psalm. In light of the redemptive work he has done on our behalf, we know that Christ himself is our Help, our Provider, the God who Sees, our Protector, our Keeper, our Comfort, our Shepherd, and our Sustainer.

You can read this book from beginning to end or choose a devotion that aligns with your current season or struggle. But all the devotions come together as one, helping to shape our understanding of God’s steadfast love for us.

As moms, we spend a lot of time looking down: at our phones, at the toddler at our feet, at our never-ending to-do lists. We also gaze to the side, envious of what others have. We might even look behind us, nostalgic about the past or ahead to the future, hoping life will someday feel more manageable than it does right now. But what if God, through his Word, is gently placing his hand under our chins and lifting our eyes upward toward him? When we fix our eyes on him and remember all that he has done, we can move forward with purpose, knowing that he is with us and has promised to help us every step of the way.

I pray that this book will remind and equip you to raise your eyes to your steady, unchanging God, who promises to keep you because of what Christ has done. He watches, guards, and protects you on the difficult days you want to escape, the glorious days you wish would never end, and every ordinary day from now to eternity. In him, we find the life-sustaining rest, provision, strength, and wisdom we need for our journey as moms.

Where does our help come from? It comes from the Lord. Let's lift our eyes to him.

PSALM 121

A Song of Ascents

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;

he who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel

will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;

the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day,

nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil;

he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep

your going out and your coming in

from this time forth and forevermore.

For centuries, Psalm 121 has given God's people hope for life's journey. Jewish pilgrims sang these words while treading the treacherous path to Jerusalem. David Livingstone, a missionary and explorer, read it aloud as he set out for the uncharted territory of central Africa in 1840.¹ Even today, this psalm hangs in the rooms of laboring Jewish mothers as they usher new life into the world.² Psalm 121 is easy to memorize and powerful to recall when the path gets steep, and you need to be reminded of who God is. Below, you'll find a memorization technique that uses the first letter of each word to help you commit this psalm to memory. Read Psalm 121 in full, then use the first-letter technique to practice reciting it a few times each day until it becomes the truth ringing in your heart.

ILUMETTH. FWDMHC?
 MHCFTL, WMHAE.
 HWNLYFBM; HWKYWNS.
 B, HWKIWNSNS.
 TLIYK; TLIYSOYRH.
 TSSNSYBD, NTMBN.
 TLWKYFAE; HWKYL.
 TLWKYGOAYCIFTTFAE.

PART ONE

The Lord Is Your Help

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

PSALM 121:1

Ancient Israelites had reasons to fear as they traveled from their homes in rural villages to the city of Jerusalem every year for one of three major feasts. Their trek was treacherous and fraught with danger: blistering heat, wild animals, and thieves hiding in the hills. These men and women must have felt acutely vulnerable and helpless.

As a mother, you can probably relate to feeling fragile and afraid at times. Though you may have never physically traveled the rocky path to Jerusalem, you are certainly familiar with the vulnerability the psalmist describes. Our journey as parents is full of steep hills and low valleys, and you may feel exhausted or worried about raising your precious children in an increasingly divided world. These feelings reveal your need for a Helper.

As we dive into a study of Psalm 121 and focus on who God has promised to be for us, we will find that he doesn't guarantee a smooth path. He offers something far better: his helpful, comforting, protective, sustaining presence. He never leaves us to walk the journey of motherhood alone.



When Peter saw Jesus miraculously walking on the Sea of Galilee, he asked if he could walk on the water too (Matthew 14:22-33). Jesus granted his request and beckoned, “Come,” and Peter climbed over the side of the boat. We can imagine Peter’s eyes fixed on Jesus as he took those first faith-filled steps on the water. But it wasn’t long before Peter’s attention shifted to his situation—he was far from solid ground. When he saw the wind and began to sink, Peter cried out to Jesus, pleading, “Lord, save me” (verse 30).

We know what it feels like to look around at our own circumstances and to sink into a pit of worry, doubt, and despair. The enemy would love nothing more than to keep our eyes fixed on the potential dangers waiting in the “hills” that surround us, trapping us in a pattern of discouragement. But when we lift our eyes to Jesus, we find that he takes us by the hand and helps us. As Scripture says in Matthew 14:31, “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of [Peter],” rescuing him from the wind and the waves that threatened to overtake him. This same God is with you and for you, and there are no hills or waves that can overwhelm the steady hand of help he has given you.



When You Feel Forgotten

THE LORD IS YOUR HELP

*For I am the LORD your God who
takes hold of your right hand and says to you,
Do not fear; I will help you.*

ISAIAH 41:13 NIV

After giving birth to our little girl, Lanie, I was fortunate to have a circle of friends who also had new babies. During those hazy newborn days, we texted each other encouragement through breastfeeding woes and sleepless nights. This connection was the lifeline that kept my head above water through an otherwise wearing, isolating season.

But four months in, Lanie's baby buddies started to leave her behind in one glaring area: sleep. Due to issues related to a tongue tie, Lanie still slept for only two hours at a time. As I began receiving glowing updates from my friends that their babies were now sleeping through the night and eating on a schedule, I wanted to be thrilled for them.

Instead, I sulked. I felt isolated, bitter, and forgotten. Waking up every two hours for months on end while caring for a toddler and a baby takes its toll, and I allowed self-pity to befriend me. It lurked in

the shadows, poised to whisper lies as I trudged down the hall for the fourth time in one night to scoop up my crying baby. Self-pity joined me at our messy lunch table where I sat heavy with discouragement from a never-ending morning of picking up sippy cups and shouldering the wearisome monotony of the day. In reality, I fell for that same old lie Eve believed in the garden: God was withholding his goodness from me. Yet the truth was, I was cradling in my arms one of his most beautiful and treasured gifts all along: my precious daughter.

In his mercy, God provided the wisdom I needed to reframe my perspective and pulled me out of a deep emotional pit. He helped me view the constant interruptions of motherhood as merely a “change of assignment.” I practiced this new mindset and declared these words aloud, which eventually helped transform my self-pity into a sense of joy and purpose. Whenever I heard my baby cry out while I was preparing a meal, getting dressed, or even sleeping, I would consciously say aloud, “Change of assignment!” and then tend to her needs. This powerful perspective shift helped me to recognize that my role as a mother was not a hindrance or distraction from more important tasks. Rather, it was the exact work God had called me to in this season of life. Through it, he was making me more like him. I was filled with hope as I realized I was not forgotten but had been given a sacred mission by the Lord.

Do you ever feel invisible or forgotten? Are you allowing a circumstance in your life to drag you into the shadows of self-pity? I encourage you to adopt this phrase too—*What is my assignment, Lord? How can I practice joyful obedience in this very moment? How can I serve you by laying down my life for others, as you did for me?* I have continued to ask myself this question for the last ten years because it’s a perspective-shaping tool for any season of the Christian life.

Dear sister, if you’re in a season that tempts you to feel forgotten

by God, be encouraged that these very days of motherhood—as trying as they can be—*are* your current assignment. God has not forgotten you. He sees you with the eyes of a loving Father and has given you this humble, holy work for his glory and for your good.

YOUR SACRED ASSIGNMENT

God does not just give us new assignments to struggle through on our own. He helps us. Here are a few applications from his Word:

- What is your assignment when your toddler has been whining for an hour, and you're ready to snap?

Remember Proverbs 12:18 and 16:24: “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (NIV); “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Ask the Lord to guard your tongue and fill your mouth with words of love and gentleness, even when you don't feel like offering them.

- What is your assignment when you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious and think you can shoulder heavy burdens on your own?

Lean on Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Even amid unrelenting needs, he can provide soul rest as we trust in him.

- What is your assignment when you're just plain exhausted from sleepless nights and want to give up?

Trust the God of Isaiah 40:29: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (NIV).

- What is your assignment when you feel ashamed for how often you've failed as a mom?

Rejoice over Psalm 103:10-12: "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." Praise him for the unending mercy he has shown us in Christ!