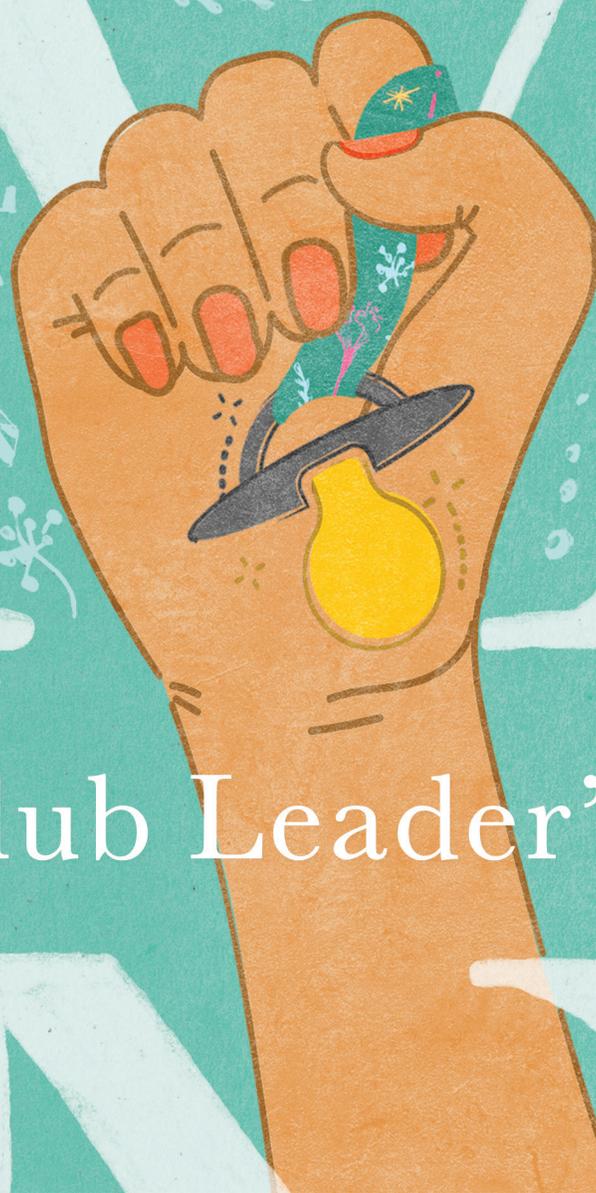


MIs for Mama



Book Club Leader's Guide

This content is based on material found in *M Is for Mama* by Abbie Halberstadt.

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A Note from Abbie:

Hello, friend! I can't even begin to express how thrilled I am that you are reading these words. Because if you are, it means you feel the Lord calling you to band together with other Christ-loving mamas in a "rebellion against mediocre motherhood," and I am convinced more each day that this is exactly what our world needs more of: Bible-believing, truth-declaring, children-loving, husband-encouraging, culture-defying mothers who desire to honor the Lord in *everything* they say and do.

Thank you for being willing to step up and take the lead. I pray that the following guide will be a huge help to you and that this study will be a blessing to all who participate.

Your fellow rebel in Christ,

Abbie





Organizing a 6- or 8-week study

Below, you'll find suggestions for how to break the book's chapters up for a 6- or 8-week study. Of course, you can do what works best for the group.

6-week study

- Week 1 — Intro, chapters 1 and 2
- Week 2 — 3, 4, 5
- Week 3 — 6, 7, 8
- Week 4 — 9, 10, 11
- Week 5 — 12, 13, 14
- Week 6 — 15, 16, 17

8-week study

- Week 1 — Intro, chapters 1 and 2
- Week 2 — 3, 4
- Week 3 — 5, 6
- Week 4 — 7, 8
- Week 5 — 9, 10
- Week 6 — 11, 12
- Week 7 — 13, 14
- Week 8 — 15, 16, 17



Group Study Guidelines for Busy Mamas

PLAN BEFOREHAND

Before you announce the study and start inviting other mamas to join you, you'll want to determine some basic parameters. This ensures that you will be able to fulfill your role as leader without feeling frazzled in the process. Here are some items you will want to decide **prior** to announcing the study:

1. Where are we meeting? Whether at your church, your home, a local coffee shop, or a restaurant, it is key to select a place that's convenient for you and offers enough room for the group you invite. If you plan to meet in a public area, one thing to consider is privacy. Will mamas be hesitant to share in a place their friends and neighbors frequent? This may not be an issue, but it's something to think about.

A virtual study is also a great option (I've seen huge success with these!), but keep in mind the potential hiccups that come with online meetings—tech issues, background noise, not to mention the disconnect that comes with not being physically present as a group. Don't underestimate the value of a hug from another mama who understands what you're going through.

2. When will we be meeting? This is a huge issue for mamas. The main thing to ensure is that the time you choose works for **you**. If *you're* struggling to keep the time you committed to, leading the group will become an unwelcome chore, or worse yet, you'll want to quit it altogether. **No time you choose will be convenient for all the mamas you invite,**

so don't feel guilty if one or two bow out because it doesn't fit their schedule.

Knowing if most of the mamas in your group work or are stay-at-home or homeschool moms might make a difference, but don't assume that just because a mama stays at home and her children are at school that she can drop everything and attend a midday study. Determine the best time for you and your family, and trust that God will bring the mamas to the study who need to hear the book's message. No regrets.

3. Who will be in my group? Determining what mamas you'll recruit to join your study might make a big difference in determining the other details. Will you be inviting moms from your church? Your neighborhood? Your network of friends? If from church, consider putting a cap on the number of people who can sign up for the study, or make sure you have a meeting space that can accommodate a bigger group.

4. Will childcare be available? Because this is a book for mamas, you can't plan a study without considering the kiddos! Though it's perfectly fine to meet somewhere and not bring the children (especially if you're meeting at a coffee shop or restaurant), you will get a better turnout (and be more inclusive of single mamas) if members know they can bring their kiddos, and someone trustworthy is there to watch them. If you're meeting at church, is there a church member or youth group worker available to help? If at home, is there a responsible older sibling looking to make a few extra bucks? Also, don't rule out

dads. Many hubbies would be thrilled to help with this! Last, consider “embracing the chaos” and meeting in a kid-friendly place where the little ones can roam close by and play while you meet and talk. Moms are fantastic multi-taskers, and many successful M Is for Mama studies (with kids!) have already taken place at a local park, play place, or even in someone’s backyard.

5. How long will the study last? And how long will we meet each week? Again, this might come down to what works best for you. Ideally, you could read a chapter per week and give yourself plenty of time to digest the content, but that’s not going to be possible for most groups, which is why I’ve included plans for 6- and 8-week studies.

If you choose a longer time, be prepared to accept that mamas might drop out as the study goes on. Generally, you will get more commitments to a shorter time frame. Reading several chapters a week might sound daunting to some mamas, but the good news is, the chapters are short and easy reads. Encourage your members to dig in for the short term so they can experience the benefits in the long term!

As for the duration of each meeting, this is entirely up to you, but anything longer than an hour per week might be a hindrance to some moms.

READ THE BOOK FIRST

Though reading first isn’t mandatory to lead the group, you will feel more prepared if you read the book prior to starting the study. This will make it easier for you to facilitate group

discussions and answer questions from your fellow mamas. If you’re stepping up to lead this group, chances are you’ve already read the book! Fist bump, mama!

BE TRANSPARENT

If you have read the book, you know that I’m not shy about sharing my own frustrations and foibles as a mama. I get regular emails from readers who were encouraged by what I share, but the material will really start to sink in if mamas are willing to discuss with the group their own personal trials and triumphs. This might require you to take the lead to help create a space where mamas feel comfortable to share. The more your group is transparent about their journeys as mamas, the more you will get out of your study time.

One thing to consider here is confidentiality. Establishing an upfront rule that whatever is shared in the group stays only in the group will encourage more open discussions. It also helps the group stay accountable to one another and avoid the temptation of gossiping.

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY

Though this suggestion might seem obvious, it bears mentioning. Pray over your group. Pray to start and end each meeting. Leave time for prayer requests. Remember that one of the main points of the book is to apply biblical wisdom to raising our children. This can’t be done without prayer...and lots of it. Ask God to reveal what He wants you to learn each week and how you can pray for others in the group.





The Culture of Mediocre Motherhood

The first chapter explores the attitudes that keep mamas stuck in a cycle of mediocrity—our current culture’s standard—as opposed to striving for a Christlike view of motherhood. For mamas to be willing to choose to follow Christ’s model for motherhood, they must first be able to see how the current culture is dragging them down into self-pity and complacency. Most importantly, they need to see the benefits of the Christlike model. Applying biblical wisdom to motherhood doesn’t mean our lives will be a cakewalk. But it does mean we will be mothering “as unto the Lord,” which brings the peace of knowing we are following in Christ’s example—a practice that produces fruit in not only us but our children as well. That is a powerful incentive!

You’ll note that each chapter concludes with the same four elements—The Narrative (comparing mediocre vs. Christlike motherhood), Action Steps, Questions, and Prayer. Though you could walk through these each week (and encourage your group to do the same as they read), the questions are geared more toward personal reflection and not group discussion. Thus, I’ll offer some questions here to facilitate meaningful dialogue in a group setting.



Discussion Questions

1. Up to this point, what has been your definition of “being a good mama?”
2. What have you heard, seen, or read lately that strikes you as an example of mediocre motherhood disguised as relatability? What is the lie hiding behind the example you chose?
3. In what area of motherhood do you struggle most to not compare yourself unfavorably to other moms?
4. Apart from Christ, we are *all* going to struggle with mediocrity. How does that realization change the way you see your own shortcomings as a mama?
5. How can our weaknesses help us conform to the image of Christ?



*Just because something is relatable
doesn't mean it's not mediocre.*

No Two Good Mamas Look Alike

Chapter two encourages mamas to celebrate each other's uniqueness and avoid falling into the traps of comparison and competition that lead to discouragement and isolation. When we understand that God gave each of us different strengths and weaknesses, not only does this free us up to experience the joy of camaraderie with other mamas but it also helps us see how He created us to serve and be served by others. We feel so much more capable of Christlike motherhood when we have a support system of other mamas there to share in our journey.



Discussion Questions

1. What impact has social media had on your relationships with other mamas? Has it brought you closer or divided you?
2. What comes easily for you as a mama? How could you use this area of strength to bless other mamas?
3. When does an area of weakness become sin?
4. What is an area in which you hear the Holy Spirit whispering, "Do better"?
5. What are the differences between saying that "no two mamas are created alike" and "there is no right or wrong way" to do motherhood?



Never compare your beginning or middle to anyone else's anything. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all good mama.

What Is That to You? Follow Me

There is a seemingly endless supply of advice available to mamas, some of which is well-intentioned but often confusing or conflicting with biblical truth. How do we sift through the myriad dos and don'ts of motherhood to incorporate the good ideas and reject the harmful ones?

This chapter encourages and challenges mamas to filter what they see and hear about motherhood through the truth of Scripture, building their discernment and becoming more confident in their identity in Christ.



Discussion Questions

1. What is the best advice you've ever received as a mom? Who gave you this advice?
2. What are some questions or comments from other mamas that bother you? Why?
3. How can we handle questions that aren't specifically addressed in Scripture?
4. What does "staying in your lane" as a Christian mama mean to you?
5. What is an area where you overthink about what others are doing? What does the Bible say about this issue?



When we are secure in that identity, we can take anything anyone else says or does with a spiritual grain of salt—especially if that advice is grounded in anything other than Bible truth.

And What Does the Lord Require of Thee?

Now that we've established that God is the only right source of understanding for our roles as mamas: What is He asking us to do, and how do we do it? Fortunately, God has spelled it out for us in His Word. This doesn't mean that doing what He requires from us will be easy—far from it at times—but there is hope. We are not alone in our pursuit of Christlikeness. We have each other and, more importantly, God will meet us in the weak moments when we reach out to Him.



Discussion Questions

1. How is God revealing His calling to you?
2. What is keeping you from praying, “Lord, show me what you have for me and then equip me to do it by your power, even if it’s nothing like I imagined it would be”?
3. What is a time in your life that you felt you were unfairly burdened? When have you felt undeservedly blessed by God? What do these experiences have in common?
4. How do you balance doing for others with meeting your own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs?
5. Are you wrestling with a particular issue for which you truly don't know what the right (godly) answer is? If so, what is it?



And I know this: He will absolutely give you more than you can handle—of both joy and pain.

Self-Care Versus Soul Care

Self-care has become a modern-day Trojan horse, bringing with it a whole host of attitudes and actions that can lead us away from our missions as Christ-seeking mamas. We'll explore how to walk that precarious tightrope of caring for ourselves physically and spiritually without becoming overly self-indulgent or unnecessarily denying ourselves rest and refreshment. Looking to Jesus as our example, we can achieve the balance that allows us to care for ourselves so that we can properly care for others.



Discussion Questions

1. What is your idea of the perfect five-minute break? How does it help you recharge?
2. How do you react when your quiet time is encroached on?
3. What is one thing that you've been denying yourself? Is there a good reason for this?
4. How do you view your time spent with God? Does it feel rejuvenating or more of a chore?
5. What steps can you take to avoid burnout?



Even when we are not perfect in our pursuit of God—which, let's be honest, is always—God is gracious to provide us with times of refreshment that minister to both our physical and spiritual needs.

When We're Guilty of Mom Guilt

We all experience mom guilt at different times. The key to not getting trapped in a place of continuous condemnation lies in having a proper understanding of the difference between fleshly guilt and Holy Spirit-initiated conviction. We can also learn to seek God's help to accomplish what needs to be done and spend less time beating ourselves up for the things we weren't able to do in our own power. Staying mired in guilt gives the enemy an open door to speak lies into our hearts that fly in the face of the truth of our identities in Christ. This chapter encourages and reminds us to stay grounded in God's Word so that guilt does not grow into a full-on shame spiral.



Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction at the end of the day if you haven't checked everything off your to-do list?
2. As you consider things that make you feel guilty, are these areas you can control? If not, does that change how you view them?
3. How do you typically deal with guilt?
4. How could your "guilt" (conviction) sometimes be a good thing?
5. Does the realization that you are not captain of your own ship comfort or concern you?



"Mom guilt" is applicable only if we are actually guilty of the mud our own brains are slinging at us.

The Profession of Motherhood

With so many lucrative at-home businesses and side hustles available to moms today, there is more pressure than ever to “balance” raising children with other pursuits. Though there is nothing inherently wrong with the desire to work and earn money, we can lose sight of our God-given responsibilities as parents if this becomes our primary focus.

Not only that, but sometimes, we don’t hold ourselves to the same professional standards at home as we would in the workplace. When we see motherhood as our most important job and not just an obligation—or worse yet, an obstacle to overcome—we can experience the peace and joy that come with being in line with God’s priorities for our lives. Not only that, but our children thrive when their mama recognizes that raising and discipling them is a high and holy calling.



Discussion Questions

1. If you have a profession or side job, how do you currently balance that with motherhood? Has reading this chapter changed your perspective on that balance?
2. How do you feel about the phrase “the profession of motherhood?”
3. How would you rate your job satisfaction as a mom? What is currently missing for you to feel more fulfilled in your role?
4. Has being a mom been a difficult adjustment for you? If so, how?
5. What messages are you sending your children by how you approach your job as a mom?



If you already are a mother, then no other profession you can claim during your primary season of mothering can trump that of your job as a mama.

When the Seat of Our Pants Tears

Training children in the way they should go is one of the most important responsibilities a mama has, but it can also be one of the most intimidating, especially if our background has not equipped us well for the task. Before we can expect to see our efforts bear fruit in our children, we must first commit to training ourselves. After all, we don't want to be hypocrites—requiring something of our children that we ourselves avoid at all costs. With God's help, we can be consistent! But we need to develop discipline to study His word and pray consistently so we can stay connected to Him and understand the precepts which we will use to “train up” our children.

This will be a tough chapter for many moms, but the good news is that God already knows our struggles and inadequacies and offers us grace upon grace in our areas of weakness. Our job is to commit each day to Him so that we can experience His guidance and care.



Discussion Questions

1. Of the four questions posed on page 106 (“A Biblical Gut Check”) which of these is the most challenging for you?
2. In what area(s) do you need more training and discipline in order to model Christlike behavior to your children?
3. How do you handle disappointment when you don't see progress?
4. What kind of upbringing did you have, and how do you think that has aided or detracted from your ability to be self-disciplined?
5. How can accountability with this group help set you on a right path of correcting bad habits and establishing godly ones?



The Lord taught me through episodes of tears and frustration, and sometimes outright clenched fist throwing, that the first thing I needed to train in myself was my reliance on him.

The Gentleness Challenge

As women and moms, we have a plethora of seemingly legitimate excuses for getting frustrated, angry, and disillusioned while raising children and managing our households. The culture of mediocre motherhood revels in these excuses, wallowing in the hard and sharing empty platitudes that we are all human and “in this together.” This chapter challenges Christian mamas to examine their own reactions to the stressors of motherhood in the light of God’s truth. Though we can acknowledge the hard, we also need to take action to ensure we don’t get stuck in a cycle of disappointment and discouragement that robs us and our families of the freedom that Christ won for us on the cross.



Discussion Questions

1. On a scale of 1-to-10, where is your “offendometer” right now? How do you respond when your emotions are high?
2. After reading this chapter, has your view changed of how the trials of motherhood are discussed in our culture? If so, how?
3. What would be your biggest challenge in speaking gently to your family for thirty days?
4. Are feelings a true indicator of who we really are? How much weight do you give your emotions?
5. Outside of hormones, what can trigger your emotions as a mom?



In ten years, will any of the temporary stress relief you get from fussing about something that seems like a big deal now have been worth the lasting effect of your harsh words about it on your children?

Training Our Kids in the Way They Should Go

Despite what culture tells us, children absolutely need training—not because they are like animals but because they, like every other human, will be quick to do what is “right in their own eyes” if we do not guide them toward biblical truth. If we choose not to take on this very necessary task, we are doing our children a huge disservice, not to mention disobeying God. Instilling biblical precepts in our children from a very early age isn’t easy and will be frustrating at times, but doing the hard work now will pay huge dividends as our children grow and mature—for us, for our kids, and for the world at large!



Discussion Questions

1. What does being a truth-teller to your children look like for you?
2. What would help you become more consistent with follow-through on disciplining your children?
3. How can you mirror God’s faithful character to your kids? What changes would you need to make to achieve that?
4. When is it okay to “let things slide”? In what areas are you too lenient with your children? Or too strict?



Regardless of our personalities—whether bold and confrontational or peace-loving and mild—we mamas are truth-tellers.



The Penny Reward System

If your children (like many) have a difficult time recognizing that righteousness is its own reward, this simple system can be an effective way of noticing and celebrating right choices. I always encourage moms to customize the PRS to fit their family's needs or come up with their own system, but if you need extra guidance, I also wrote an ebook to answer all of the detailed questions (you can find it at misformama.net/penny-reward-system). The point is not a rote "performance + reward" model but instead an encouragement to pay attention so that we can genuinely "catch" our children doing something especially kind or helpful and then unexpectedly and delightedly encourage and uplift them to "not grow weary of doing good" (Galatians 6:9).



Discussion Questions

1. What methods of encouragement do your children respond best to? How could these be incorporated in your system?
2. How do you feel about encouraging good habits with external motivation? Do we see anywhere in the Bible that God blesses His children with good things when they do right?
3. What systems have you tried before? What worked and what didn't?
4. What part of teaching your children to love and do the right thing is most difficult for you?
5. In what ways do your kids show kindness?



*Following Jesus is its own reward.
But sometimes our kids need something
tangible to remind them of this fact.*

Boot Camp Parenting

Though the name may sound drastic, Boot Camp Parenting is really just a way of focusing concentrated effort on one problem area at a time. It's often tempting, and frankly easier (at least, in the short term), to hope our children will just grow out of unhelpful behaviors rather than try to work through the issues. Or maybe, it all seems so overwhelming that we don't know where to start. By breaking behavioral challenges down into smaller components and devoting one focused week to addressing a specific area, we can alleviate the stress of letting the problem persist and causing ourselves and our kids more problems and stress in the long run. Being willing to tackle minor frustrations *now* before they grow into big bad habits is just one small way we can faithfully run the race of parenting well in Christ's strength.



Discussion Questions

1. Are you in a difficult parenting phase right now? If so, how are you coping with it?
2. How could your biggest parenting dilemma be turned into bite-sized goals?
3. If you have multiple children, how has your perspective on getting through tough phases changed over the years?
4. Is there a bad habit that you have let go unchecked for too long? If so, why?
5. Think of a parenting victory you've had in correcting a bad habit. How did you solve the issue, and how long did it take?



Boot camp parenting is as much about training ourselves to put in the hard work of mothering well in intensive scenarios as it is about shaping our children's habits.

Cultivating a Peaceful Home

As we explore how to teach our children to live at peace with each other and others, this chapter exposes one of the biggest lies of mediocre motherhood—that “relatable” is the same thing as “acceptable.” We can all relate to wanting to “get even,” but this doesn’t legitimize the sinful behavior.

Cultivating a peaceful home requires a lot of repetitive, consistent follow-through on our part, not only by reminding our children to choose godly behaviors but also by modeling those actions ourselves. It’s a lot of work! But it is *so* worth the effort in the dividends of peace and joy it pays in return!



Discussion Questions

1. What typically starts a fight in your house? What underlying sin is causing your children to act out?
2. How do you resolve your children’s disagreements? What have you seen success with?
3. Has your upbringing affected how you view your children’s fights? If so, how?
4. What is an area where setting expectations ahead of time would help your children?
5. How do you model healthy conflict resolution to your children?



If your goal is a peaceful home from the beginning, then it’s imperative to nip bickering in the bud before it has the chance to become a well-worn family dynamic.

We Are the Gatekeepers

Taking an active role in being aware of and regulating the media our children are exposed to is one of the key areas where we as Christian mamas must rise above the culture's standard that puts our kids at constant risk of isolation and exploitation. Our role as media "gatekeepers" is more crucial than ever as media drifts ever farther away from Christian values or even "traditional" notions of goodness and decency (which have their roots in God's Laws). Though we can't micromanage everything our kids will be exposed to, we must remain vigilant, engaged, and willing to draw lines of conviction within our own homes with regard to what we will allow our children to watch, read, look at, and listen to.



Discussion Questions

1. Where do you draw the lines in your home about what media your family consumes?
2. When you look at your own media consumption, where could you use more discernment?
3. What are some uplifting books or television shows that your family enjoys?
4. When you compare the secular gold standard for children's media discussed in this chapter with God's standard, what are the biggest differences you see?
5. Do you feel pressure to allow your children to watch and read things you feel uneasy about?



Mediocrity is stagnant. But excellence requires us to keep growing and evolving in Christlikeness, even if it doesn't look just like what our neighbors do.

The Birds and the Bees

Having “the talk” with our children can be intimidating, but if we don’t explain God’s design for sex and intimacy to them, they will form their own conclusions based on the misguided and aggressively unbiblical information they encounter at school or, gulp, from their peers.

Fortunately, this task is made easier by God’s Word. All we need to know and pass on about healthy sexuality can be found in the Bible, and when we emphasize God’s *good* design for sex within marriage, we lay a foundation for our children’s futures that includes excitement for purity and marital intimacy.



Discussion Questions

1. What gives you most pause about having discussions with your children about sex and God’s design for our bodies?
2. What is your view of sex and intimacy? Is it a positive one?
3. How has your own upbringing and sexual history impacted how you engage with your children on this topic?
4. If you have already had these talks with your kids, is there anything you wish you would have said or done differently?
5. Does our current “cancel culture” climate make you hesitant to stand up for Christian values in this area?



God had a plan for intimacy between men and women long before they were faced with the prospect of outlining “the birds and the bees” for their kids.

You Don't Have to Do It All

Our culture celebrates multi-tasking and self-sufficiency, which places incredible pressure on mamas to do it all. But does any of this line up with biblical truth?

God designed us to bless and be blessed by others. He gave us Christ's church and our fellow believing brothers and sisters as support and help. For those of us who struggle to be all things to all people, our pride might be wounded by the truth that we can't do everything, but that truth should also free us. Christlike motherhood admits the need for help and freely offers it to others as well.



Discussion Questions

1. In what area do you need to ask for more help?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to admit that you can't do it all?
3. Do you think your children are capable of helping more than they do? What keeps you from getting them more involved with chores?
4. How does the culture of mediocre motherhood play into the myth that we should be able to do it all?
5. Do you find it uncomfortable to offer help to others? Or to accept it from them?



Why would we think that when we are struggling and in need of help, accepting it is a shameful act that makes us "less than" in any way?

Emotions Are Not Facts

Emotions are extremely powerful influences on our daily life, but they don't have to dictate our choices and actions. Praise God we have the Holy Spirit to whisper truth to our hearts, even when we are at our most sleep-deprived, hormonally imbalanced, and overwhelmed. The key is to immerse ourselves in God's Word and to look to godly examples full of wisdom, rather than allowing ourselves to be swayed by nice-sounding-but-ultimately-empty platitudes like "your emotions are your truth" and "all feelings are valid." Looking to Jesus and staying closely connected to others who will build us up and challenge us when needed can keep us from falling into a mire of self-pity and hopelessness, which is never where a Christian should stay.



Discussion Questions

1. In what areas do you find it most difficult not to be swayed by your emotions?
2. How does your interaction with social media affect your emotions?
3. Where do you go for help when your emotions are overwhelming you?
4. Do you trust your feelings? How do you react to the cultural belief that "all feelings are valid?"
5. How can you give thanks in all circumstances?



We, as Christian mamas, forsake whatever tugs our hearts toward the mediocrity of loving ease and comfort over the excellence of taking up our crosses to follow Jesus.