



This Life That Is Ours

MOTHERHOOD AS
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



LAUREN BURDETTE

*For Declan, Ronan, and Healy.
Thank you for making me a mother. I love you.*



THIS LIFE THAT IS OURS: Motherhood as Spiritual Practice
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Cover Design: Derek Thornton, Faceout Studio

Cover Imagery Painted by Gina Detweiler, www.ginadetwiler.com

Interior design and typesetting: PerfectType | Nashville, TN

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Burdette, Lauren, author.

Title: This life that is ours : motherhood as spiritual practice / Lauren Burdette.

Description: Nashville : Upper Room Books, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2018042153 (print) | LCCN 2018056142 (ebook) | ISBN

9780835818650 (Mobi) | ISBN 9780835818667 (Epub) | ISBN 9780835818643

(print)

Subjects: LCSH: Motherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity—Miscellanea. | Mothers—Religious life—Miscellanea.

Classification: LCC BV4529.18 (ebook) | LCC BV4529.18 .B86 2019 (print) | DDC 242/.6431—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018042153>

Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION

The most beautiful word on the lips of [humankind] is the word “Mother,” and the most beautiful call is the call of “My mother.” It is a word full of hope and love, a sweet and kind word coming from the depths of the heart.

—Kahlil Gibran¹

“What does it look like to pursue holiness as a mother?” I asked my journal. It was September 2011, and my oldest son was about to turn one. His two siblings were yet to be born. I was a year into motherhood, and every day I felt like I was barely keeping my head above water. My life was diapers and feedings and sleepless nights after diapers and feedings and sleepless nights. In the whirlwind of these physical demands, I struggled to find time for myself, let alone time for God.

In the stolen moments I found to consider the question of holiness in motherhood, all I could picture was an angel floating on a cloud bouncing a baby on her knee. This image was absurd and unattainable. The next image that came to mind was Mary, serene and Sphinx-like as she treasured all she experienced in her heart—also unattainable. I realized

that any picture I had for holiness in motherhood did not match my own messy, challenging reality. I missed the deep relationship with God that I had cultivated through prayer and journaling, retreats and service. I feared I would never have that close relationship with the Lord again.

I also feared that now mothering would be my only path of relationship with God. I was wary of any suggestion that motherhood reveals the true holy path for women. I didn't want all of who I was in God to be reduced to motherhood. I rejected the notion that we are made whole or complete through becoming a mother, as if something is lacking in us that can only be filled by children. God's creativity and imagination are greater than that. Yet I couldn't escape that lingering sense of curiosity, that question of what holiness in motherhood could be like. What if motherhood could be a spiritual practice?

Part of my curiosity, when I wrote that question, came from my work as a spiritual director. I began my training in spiritual direction the year Declan, my oldest, was born. Spiritual direction is a practice of listening for the presence of God in your life. Spiritual directors meet with individuals or groups. Directees share what is happening in their life, the good and the bad, and together with their director, they explore where and how God might be moving and what invitations God might be offering. The goal is to grow deeper in relationship with God based on the belief that God is active wherever we are active.

As a new mother and an emerging spiritual director, I wondered how to integrate my passions—to bring my spiritual self into my life as a mom. Life was hectic and I was just getting by, so this question lay dormant for three years. I birthed two more babies, completed my training, and began to work as a spiritual director. When that seed of a question finally sprouted, it sprang up as a fully formed idea: a book that would invite mothers to explore the spiritual journey of motherhood.

It happened at the tail end of a conference I attended in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2015 with Spiritual Directors International. This organization hosts a gathering of spiritual companions each year that refreshes and inspires me, both professionally and personally. I was invited to serve that year as the facilitator for the New Contemplatives Initiative, which offers scholarships to involve more young spiritual directors in the organization. In my role, I helped a talented group of younger directors build community with one another and with the wider community. I also helped them prepare a presentation that allowed them to share their collective wisdom with the conference attendees.

During this year's conference, six of my friends—all of whom are young spiritual directors living in different places around the world—came to Pittsburgh, where I live, so we could drive to Louisville together. My daughter, Healy, was just three months old, and she traveled with us. With her car seat nestled in the center of the van, my friend Nita called her the “heartbeat of our caravan.”

On the drive back to Pittsburgh after the conference, I asked my friends, “What invitation are you hearing out of this time?” For the next six hours, each of them described the deep soul connections they had made, the inspiring conversations in which they had participated, the seeds of ideas that were planted over the weekend, and the ways they could imagine those seeds coming to life when they returned home.

I listened in awe and gratitude—and in jealousy. I had spent much of the conference rushing between my baby and the group of New Contemplatives. I nursed between presentations and rocked Healy in the back of the room during workshops. My parents met us at the conference and helped with her while I worked with the New Contemplatives, but even when Healy wasn’t with me, she was on my mind.

In the van on that drive back, the conversation eventually slowed. Then my friend Lance asked, “What about you, Lauren?”

I started to cry. I told them how different my experience had been from theirs, how shrouded in motherhood it had been.

“I would like to have big dreams,” I told them, “but I can’t think beyond wanting sleep and oxygen—space to breathe.”

“What if you *did* have a big dream?” he asked. “What would it be?”

“It would be to write a book,” I said.

I was surprised by these words. My desire to write had lain dormant for so long, hibernating beneath the demanding

day-to-day reality of life with my kids. I had forgotten how to listen for and hear my own deep longings.

But there it was: I wanted to write a book. And I knew exactly what type of book it would be. It would be a book that honored the mess and the fatigue and the frustrations of our daily lives as mothers, as well as its joys. It would be a book that explored the holiness of motherhood and brought my curiosity as a spiritual director to bear on my experience as a mom. It would be the book I'd wished I'd had when I became a mother and that I still need as I navigate life with my three children today and wonder how God is present through it all. It would be this book.



The Spiritual Directors International conference in Louisville took place during the 100th anniversary of Thomas Merton's birth. Merton was a Trappist monk, a mystic and poet, and an activist. A prolific author, his books on spirituality have shaped the face of contemporary Christianity. Much of the 2015 conference was centered on his life and work. As part of the festivities, we were invited to make a pilgrimage to Fourth and Walnut, an important location in Merton's life. It was there, at a busy city street corner, that Merton had a famous epiphany he relays in his book *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness. . . . And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.²

Merton witnessed the beauty and holiness that dwells within each person and experienced a profound sense of interconnectedness. Fourth and Walnut has become a place of pilgrimage, where pilgrims honor Merton's memory and look for their own experience of God shining in everyone around them. As part of the conference, we were given ribbons to tie around the plaque that commemorates this sacred spot in the center of downtown Louisville. It was a way to connect with the spirit of Thomas Merton, to connect with the community of spiritual directors, and to remember that the work of spiritual direction is the work of seeing and honoring the unique ways we each shine forth the glory of God.

As the days of the conference passed, I heard story after story from other attendees of how meaningful it was for them to visit Fourth and Walnut. Meanwhile, my ribbon still lay in my bag, and I had no hope of finding time to tie it around the plaque. I was frustrated to not get to participate

in this collective holy moment. As I nursed my daughter and prayed through the disappointment, God spoke to me: *This is not your pilgrimage. Your pilgrimage is your journey back home.*

When I got home, I tied the ribbon that was intended for Fourth and Walnut around a lamp in my living room and thanked God for the way the people in my house shine like the sun. That ribbon has served as a visual reminder to tune in to the beauty and holiness of my family. It reminds me to pause from the mundane and open my eyes to the divine.

The invitation to make a pilgrimage to my own home showed me that I had been asking the wrong question. It's not about whether motherhood is a better way to connect with God or a worse way, a holier or less holy path. It simply is my path, and God desires to meet me on it. The Lord wasn't hanging out at that Louisville street corner, wondering when I would show up. God meets me within this life. God desires to meet you in your life as well. The spiritual life is not found only on Sundays, or on a mountain peak, or in the Bible, or at Fourth and Walnut. It didn't die when we had children or go into hibernation until our kids get older. It is now, here: This life is the spiritual life. Our pilgrimage begins wherever we are.

This life where God desires to meet me is not mine alone. My life ceased belonging to me when I became a mom: My time was no longer mine, my body was no longer mine, no part of my day belonged to me alone. It was a difficult reality to adjust to, but I also suspect it always has been

true—my life was never just my own. My children have invited me into a deeper reality. My life was always shared with God, who continually draws me into closer relationship with God's self and with others. My children have broken me of the false narrative of my life being my own. I now know that it belongs to God, to my partner, to my children, and to my community as well as to myself.

This sharing of life, this “ours” instead of “mine,” is not all sacrifice and hardship. With collective identity comes life-giving connection and belonging. One of the most beautiful pieces of shared life has been in my friendships with other mothers. For each of us, becoming a mother meant crossing a profound threshold. Life is different on the other side. I am grateful for the sisterhood of connection that is woven of our shared experiences. Likewise, I share my motherhood with you, knowing that we are connected through the path of parenting. I hope this book will be a place of relationship, a place to share life with each other and with God, a place to remember that you are not alone.

If this life that is ours is the spiritual life, if God desires to meet us within our parenting, how can we experience that? Perhaps we could each begin our exploration with a ribbon, with a way to name our homes and lives as holy ground. These pages will help you continue the journey. They will be a light on the path as we practice encountering God and encountering our true selves within the chaotic choreography of motherhood.



As a spiritual director, I have the privilege of hearing people's stories. I bear witness to the ways God reaches out to my directees and the ways they respond. I watch the relationship unfold between them and God.

There are patterns to these stories, and similar themes: love, loss, consolation, desolation, joy, grief. But the way these themes unfold in a person's life and the way God speaks to them and they respond are always original. We are each unique, and it is one of my greatest joys to be present to the myriad mysterious ways the Lord moves in each life that I companion.

Motherhood holds that same tension. Shared patterns overlay each individual experience. We share the experience of dying to our egos, of falling in love with our children, of feeling like we can't do it, and of being made new ourselves. Yet we each live out our motherhood and hear the Holy Spirit's whispers in our unique way.

There is no obvious way to be present to the spirituality of parenting, to attend to Christ in your children and your own deepening in holiness. Your way is not my way, and how you grow and connect today will be different from how you grow and connect tomorrow. I hope my companionship keeps you focused on your path and encourages you in your

efforts. I will wonder with you about the places to explore next and what it means to be where you are.

After a period of **Preparation Days**, our exploration of this holy life will unfold in three parts. In the first, **Becoming a Mother**, we will return to the memories of first crossing the threshold of motherhood. We will look honestly at our experiences, the places of consolation and desolation, the points of light and darkness. We will hold these memories gently and listen for God's voice within them. We then move to **Becoming Yourself** to reflect on the ways our own identities are forged alongside our children's. This section is an invitation to come home to yourself as you listen for who God is creating you to be. The third section, **Becoming Holy**, considers some of the ways mothering draws us deeper into life with God. It honors the ways mothering is holy work.

In each reflection, I share a bit of my journey and then ask questions that invite you to explore your own story. I hope the questions will be spaces of opening and expansion for you, that they will help you create time to sit with your experience and listen to your life. You could move through this book in a daily rhythm, reading a reflection every day. You could move more slowly, staying with each reflection for several days or a week. You could read the book in order, maybe using a ribbon as a bookmark, or you could flip to sections at random. Move at the pace that is right for you. Choosing your pace for the book can be your first step in this practice of listening to your life as you listen for your

own needs and desires as well as God's invitation within the pages.

Use this book as it works for you. Some of the reflections and questions in this book may not engage you, and that is fine. Other questions may contain worlds for you to explore. If certain questions are surprising or uncomfortable or full of solace, stay with them. Bring the question to God in prayer and ask what God might want to reveal to you. Stay with the question, repeating your reading and reflection, for as long as you feel led.

I hope you find a way to share your responses to the reflection questions, the holy moments you experience, the stories that are yours. You might carry the questions through the day with you and answer them in your heart. You might journal your responses. You might talk about your thoughts and experiences with your partner, a close friend, or in prayer with God. You might use this book to guide discussion in your community or with a small group. You might find it fruitful to work through these questions with a spiritual director. However you process your engagement with this book, I pray that it opens a window to your soul.

This book creates space for you—the beautiful, unique mother you are to your beautiful, unique children—to contemplate your relationship with your children and your relationship with God; to rest, to mourn, to be in awe, and to experience the presence of the holy in the mundane. May these pages be a companion as you awaken to the holy potential of this life that is ours.

PREPARATION DAYS

Several years ago, I began praying through something called the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It is a school of discipleship, a “retreat” you can make in your daily life to draw closer to God, and I couldn’t wait to get started. I committed to praying for an hour a day for however long it would take to complete the Exercises—at least six months.

The Exercises were written by Ignatius of Loyola in the early 1500s, and they are divided into four “weeks.” I was surprised, then, that I didn’t start my Exercises with Week One. Instead, my spiritual director guided me through Ignatius’s “Preparation Days,” prayers that were meant to open my heart to what was coming and that would provide guidance for learning the Ignatian forms of prayer.

My eager heart felt frustrated by this slower start to the process at the time, but I’ve now come to see its wisdom. Preparation Days are like a base camp, a place to anticipate what is coming and to gently practice some of the skills we will need to walk the journey.

In this preliminary section, I would like to offer the same to you. Here, we are going to consider some steps you can take to prepare to enter this holy journey into the heart of your life as a mother.

Physical Space

First, let's consider the place you might go to pray with these reflections. Where in your house could you sit regularly to read and ponder and pray? Even if you're only able to carve out a few minutes to reflect, it can be helpful to have a regular place for it—a spot that is yours. You could light a candle to mark your entrance into prayer. You could place a picture, icon, or painting nearby that speaks to you in some way of God's love. You could keep a cozy blanket in that spot to wrap around yourself to remind you that you are held and loved by God.

I wrote most of this book at a small table in our guest room. It is far from glamorous. A folding chair sits at my first kitchen table, which I bought from IKEA when I was in college. I keep an electric blanket nearby to tuck around my legs on cold days. On the wall hangs a painting of a grey wagtail surrounded by vibrant flowers that was painted by my talented friend Claire; it invites me to explore the beautiful wilds. On the table, nestled amid stacks of books and papers, rests a small statue of Mary cradling an infant Jesus. I light a candle before I pick up my pen to remind me that writing is prayer.

Your space doesn't have to be perfect or clean or set aside just for prayer. It could be your favorite spot on the couch or a chair at the kitchen table amid the dirty dinner dishes. I have different spots in different rooms for different activities or times of day. I place a pillow against the wall when I

pray in the guest room. In the living room, I curl up on the couch with spiritual reading and my morning coffee. My friend Amber, a fellow mother, has set up a prayer space in her dark, unfinished basement. It's not beautiful, she says, but it is quiet and private.

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius considers preparation for prayer to be nearly as important as prayer itself. He instructs retreatants to stand before their prayer space before they settle into prayer and to pray an Our Father to prepare their hearts and mark the transition. You could try the same, pausing for a moment to center yourself before physically settling in to your chosen space. Wherever your reading and prayer space may be, try to find a place where you can cross a physical or metaphorical threshold as you approach the space to read, to wonder, and to pray.

*Where in your house could be your holy place?
How will you mark your entrance into prayer?*

Interior Space

In addition to preparing a physical place to pray, I invite you to prepare a place within, an interior space in which to meet yourself and to meet God.

To help you create this space, first take some time to remember where and when you have felt most loved, most at home, and most peaceful. Savor these memories and the emotions they stir in you. What elements from those spaces can inspire your interior space? My spiritual director loves

the ocean, and she often imagines she is at the beach when she prays. I know someone whose interior space resembles a dark, quiet cave. I often picture myself sitting with Jesus at a campfire, where we rest and share stories.

In *Practicing the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence describes the heart as a prayer room, a place to encounter God. The heart is also a place to encounter ourselves. By imagining this place, we practice interior hospitality. We create room within our heart to receive ourselves and to explore our journey with “the kindness and reverence of candlelight,” as the poet and philosopher John O’Donohue writes.¹ I invite you to create a space within your heart where you can meet God. May it be a sanctuary where you can bring your new, tender self to be held in warmth and light.

What image or feeling helps you imagine such a place within you? How might that space help you to explore your experience as a mother and ponder where God has been present to you?

Practicing Contemplation

Preparation Days are an opportunity to try on a posture of contemplation, which theologian Walter Burghardt, SJ, defines as “a long, loving look at the real.”² To practice contemplation is to practice being a bit more awake to our days in a way that frees us from judgment and opens our hearts to others. Contemplation is closely related to mindfulness, the practice of grounding yourself in the present moment,

no matter where you are or what you are doing. It is being present as you change pee-soaked sheets, sweep up spilled or thrown food, and take in the warmth of your child as she hugs your legs mid-task. As a mom, opening up to contemplation is both challenging and freeing. It provides a momentary release from the running narrative of all there is to do and all the ways it can be done better. It opens us to the gift of this very moment.

Here is a way to practice: Take a few minutes to notice how your body is feeling. Are you hot, cold, tired, sore, hungry? Where in your body do you experience pain or discomfort? As you notice how your physical body is feeling, check in with your soul as well. What emotions do you feel in this moment? What thoughts circle your mind? What worries for your family or the world weigh on your heart? As you notice the things that weigh on your body and soul, gently release them without judgment.

You can practice being contemplative throughout the day by taking a moment to identify your physical state and emotions and by taking a few deep and centering breaths. I call these moments “contemplative pauses,” tiny breaks in my day when I detach from the chaos around me and center myself within the deeper reality of God’s love. You can practice spontaneously throughout the day or set a reminder on your phone to invite you into a contemplative pause. Growing in awareness of how you are, who you are, and what you are experiencing will be a central part of our journey.

What does contemplation mean to you? As you begin to practice pausing within your day, what do you notice?

Practicing Silence

God can communicate with us through any moment in our life. God can reach out to us through our emotions, our physical senses, or a feeling of weight or lightness of being. God can speak to us through the words of a friend or words on a page; through music, nature, and our children. But God seems to be particularly drawn to silence and subtlety. In 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV), the Lord tells Elijah to stand on the mountain and wait, as the Lord is about to pass by:

A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

The Lord, as God so often is, was in the whisper, in the gentleness, in the quiet instead of the chaos.

I find God's preference for silence challenging and often incompatible with my life as a mother. God may be in the silence, but my children are in the powerful wind, the earthquake, and the fire. Life with children is loud and chaotic.

So many things call for our attention. When I finally meet silence, I often don't know what to do with it. I'm out of practice, and I forget how to sit and breathe, in and out, and to leave space for the Lord to speak.

I know God doesn't only communicate in the silence. I believe God speaks to us through the whole of our life. But silence creates space for us to practice listening for God so that we may better experience God's presence in all areas. Silence is a spiritual practice that prepares us to receive mothering as a spiritual practice. It is a practice I need help practicing.

I invite you to practice being in silence. You could start with this: Set a timer for just five minutes. For those five minutes, pick one focal point. It could be your breath. It could be your heartbeat. It could be an image of Jesus, either physical or imagined. You could try a single word. Pick one thing, and then let the timer run. Let yourself feel uncomfortable. Let your mind wander, and then gently bring it back to your point of focus. Then, when the timer goes off, you're done. Don't worry about how it went or if it was a "good" or "bad" time of silence. Remind yourself that this is practice.

Are you naturally drawn to quiet, or is this a more challenging practice for you? As you practice sitting in silence, what do you notice? What bubbles to the surface?



Stay with the practice of daily silence and contemplation, and the other reflections of these Preparation Days, as long as you wish. Move forward when you feel ready, whether that's in a day, a week, or a month.

Lastly, I offer a blessing for you, as you begin the journey:

May courage be yours.

May peace be yours.

May patience and curiosity and wonder be yours.

*May you be met with ample space to hold your
own story.*

*May each period mark a holy pause and a deep
breath.*

May you stay with your thoughts,

Dance with your imagination,

And follow the nudging of the Spirit.

May the words be here when you need them

And fall away when you don't.

May the path lead you home to yourself again.

*May the road wind you deeper into the heart of
God.*

Amen.

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PART I

Becoming a Mother

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The First Moments



Before my first son was born, I had two miscarriages. Those losses were both physically and emotionally painful, and I doubted I would ever become a mother. My mom and my friends told me I was already a mother to the two babies I had lost, but that didn't feel real at the time. During my third pregnancy, doubt and fear crowded out my hope. Since I had lost so much already, I found it hard to believe this child would ever live outside of my womb.

When I was a week past my due date, Nick and I went in for a routine ultrasound to make sure the baby was still healthy and safe. Midway through, the tech paused the ultrasound, called the midwife on duty, and then put me on the phone with her.

"Your amniotic fluid is low," the midwife said. "It is time for you to have this baby."

So much began to swirl through my heart and mind. I felt joy that it was time. At forty-one weeks, I had begun to feel I would be pregnant forever. I felt fear and sadness too

as this meant I would need to be induced, rather than having the completely natural childbirth I had planned. I also felt panic. We were unprepared for this moment; we had not brought our bag to the hospital (a rookie mistake!). I hadn't made our bed or eaten breakfast. I was not ready.

The midwife gave us permission to go home and get the bag, so long as we promised to be back within an hour. I moved through that hour in a fog of nervous excitement. We rushed to Panera, where I ate a bagel as quickly as I could. At home, I threw the comforter over our bed and crammed last-minute items into the hospital bag.

Then we were back to the hospital in the birthing room, where Nick taped soothing pictures of the ocean and fall leaves to the walls and turned on our CD of ocean sounds. My doula and my parents were on their way. I was given something to soften my cervix and told to rest and relax.

"Most women don't feel a thing right now," the nurse said, "although 5 percent of women do experience strong contractions." I was in the 5 percent. I went from feeling nothing to having intense, painful contractions every two minutes. I couldn't catch my breath or get ahead of them. I started vomiting and couldn't stop, so I asked for an epidural.

"Are you *sure* this is what you want?" the midwife asked. "Your birth plan says we should try to talk you out of it."

Through waves of nausea and pain, I managed to say, "Nothing about this was in the plan!"

I got the epidural at 5:00 p.m., six hours after we'd arrived for the induction.

It was a long, slow night of waiting for my body to be ready to birth. At 1:00 a.m., when everyone in the room except me and my doula had slept, the nurse said I was ready to push. Four hours later—an absurd, surreal amount of time to have spent pushing—my body figured out what to do. I could feel the “ring of fire” as Declan’s head crowned.

Push and push and push—his head was out. Push. *Push.*

His tiny body slipped free of mine, and he was *here*, sliding around on my belly as I wrapped my shaking arms around him. He was the most stunning thing I had ever seen. I repeated in a chant of wonder, “He’s here. He’s real. I can’t believe it. He’s perfect. He’s beautiful. I can’t believe he’s here.”

At first, the midwife seemed pleased with how he was doing. Then a shadow of concern crossed her face. She held him and smacked his bottom once, then twice. He gave a small yelp, as if to say, “I’m just fine, but if you need me to make a sound, I will.”

I could feel the deep peace of Declan’s personality already present. I was in total awe of him, of myself, of the moment, and of the paradigm shift his birth brought to me. I seemed to feel reality rupture and rebuild itself in that moment: life before and life after.

Tell Your Story

Remember your first birth story or the first time you met your first child through adoption, fostering, or stepmothering. What did those first moments of becoming a mother hold for you?



The First Days

Declan's birth overwhelmed me with its holiness. And it overwhelmed me with pain. I was exhausted, I could barely stand, and all I wanted was sleep. I had just done the most challenging physical thing I had ever done, by far, and it seemed I should get time to recover.

Instead, my focus immediately went to another physical being. I nursed fifteen to twenty minutes per side every two hours, praying my milk would come in. I bathed and changed my newborn and greeted visitors who came to see me in my hospital room. My broken body felt like an afterthought to me, my visitors, and the hospital staff as Declan drew the attention of everyone in the room. Through the dense fog of exhaustion and recovery, I wondered when I would feel the joy, when I would stop feeling like I was operating beyond my capacity.

After we left the hospital and went home, I couldn't sleep. My body had trained itself to hear every snuffle and whimper and snort of the newly breathing being beside me.

I urged my body to relax, but my knowing I had only an hour until the next feeding kept me awake.

My anxiety and physical fatigue worsened. Thankfully, after about a week, my mother took charge: “The baby is not sleeping in your room tonight, and I’m giving him a bottle.” I slept for a blessed four-hour stretch that night. I realized that I would have to learn how to take care of myself too if I were going to make it through this season. Declan wasn’t the only one who needed to sleep, to eat, and to be bathed. I needed to care for my physical self with meals and showers and rest.

That small stretch of sleep gave me a tiny bit of distance, which helped me to see Declan and to take in his beauty. He would blink at me with his large, blue eyes, and everything else in my world would fall away like dust compared to the sheer miracle of his peaceful, perfect being. Finally, I felt something other than fear and fatigue. I felt love, deep and all-encompassing and new.

Tell Your Story

As you reflect on those first days of motherhood, what do you notice? How did you respond to this life-altering shift?