

What the Holy Spirit Revealed to a Mother as Her Son Lay Dying

I am the mother of eight children, something that feels very normal and unimpressive to me, but usually elicits a response of shock and awe in people I meet. I feel largely unremarkable. You, too?

In all these years of mothering, there have been joyful, wonderful, absolutely fun days, and there have been hopeless, depressing, despairing and desperate days when I wanted to stay crouched beneath the covers and not have to face all of those little and not-so-little people who expected me to at least feed them.

What hope is there for us when we see only the messes, only the discipline issues, only the strained marriage and the family problems and the failing business? We need hope, don't we?

What if I told you that the God who created you, created the universe, created every living thing, loves you, cares deeply for you and has a perfect plan to bring all of our hopelessness to an end because He perfectly provides, perfectly protects and perfectly carries out everything He set out to accomplish?

In the summer of 2008, I found our 7-week-old in a coma. He was barely breathing, his skin was blue, and his eyes were rolled back into his head. An ambulance rushed him to the nearest ER, but it wasn't until he arrived at a children's hospital late that night that a diagnosis was made. We were told to sleep with our cell phones because he probably wouldn't make it through the night.

He had a deadly enterovirus, and it sent his body into liver failure, kidney failure, damaged his heart and permanently damaged his brain.

As I stood over my tiny dying boy there in that ICU, I suddenly heard the sounds of a woman wailing outside our little Joe's room. She had lost her daughter to cancer, and she was hopelessly wailing.

In that moment, I knew. I was so busy placing our hope for our children in everything but God. Our homeschooling, our church, our theology, our choices. These were the things I was hoping were going to keep our children from harm and cause them to grow up following Christ and living a life without major issues.

I knew, too, that that woman felt hopeless, and I was so busy camping on things that were not the gospel, when what our dying world—what we — need, is the gospel.

The gospel is this, in the words of author and pastor Tim Keller, "... we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared to believe, and at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

This is the only kind of relationship that will really transform us. Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us. The merciful commitment strengthens us to see the truth about ourselves and repent. The conviction and repentance moves us to cling to and rest in God's mercy and grace."

Love without truth is sentimentality

We can't ever forget the gospel. In the midst of the yelling, brain-damaged 8-year-old, the dinner boiled over and pouring down the cabinets, the broken clothes dryer, the car that leaves us stranded on the side of the freeway (again), we must never, never, never lose sight of the fact that we are cared for by the God who gives us the only hope we can ever rely upon.

He doesn't look at you and see stressed-out mom. He doesn't look at you and see failed marriage. He doesn't look at you and see a girl who's really bad at math. He doesn't look at you and see a failure who once again couldn't get dinner on the table in time.

He sees Jesus. He defines you by Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus, who lived a perfect life. I have not lived a perfect life, and there are nine people who live in my house who will testify that I have not lived a perfect hour. But my Jesus – He lived a perfect life, and when God looks at me, He sees Jesus.

And when He looks at you—cowering, defeated, lonely, out of control, controlling, mouthy, sinful, needy—He sees Jesus.

It will always serve us well to remember Whose we are and what He's done for us. Instead of us, He has placed Jesus over, around, in and under, to cover and to answer and to be everything we cannot and are not.

That's the good news. That's the gospel, and it is our hope.
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*Adapted from . **Kendra Fletcher**, homeschooling mom of eight, had it all "right," until it all fell apart. In the course of 18 months, Kendra found her baby in a coma, ran over her five-year-old, and nearly lost her eight-year-old to a septic ruptured appendix. Lost and Found is the story of how God used those events to transform her family's self-righteous religion*

into freedom in Christ.

Fletcher's debut book is the gripping true story of how God used suffering to save her family from empty religion. As wave after wave of crisis hit, the Fletchers discovered that getting religion "right" wasn't a good substitute for a living relationship with a loving God. Through their suffering, they learned about misplaced identities and false hope, and they threw themselves wholly into the arms of Jesus—where they found the grace they needed.