

dear mary

Lessons From the Mother
of Jesus for the Modern Mom

SARAH JAKES



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introduction

by Cora Jakes-Coleman

*D*ear Mary,
As mothers, we have difficulty with every new struggle, level, and storm our children go through, whether it's starting school, going off to college, battling addiction, teen pregnancy, adoption, and the list goes on. In addition to being challenging, walking our children through these stages often requires a huge sacrifice on our part. As I think about your example as a mother, I am amazed by the sacrifices you made for the betterment of the world. As I think of your story, and your Son's story, I am in awe of your ability to trust God without doubt, hesitation, or resistance—never once worrying about what anyone might say, including Joseph.

You accepted God's call, probably not even considering the pain, agony, and sacrifice required. Your story empowers mothers, while also challenging us to believe God in ways that we never have before. As a mother myself, I wonder

how hard it was for you to accept this call and trust God. I wonder if modern-day mothers would have accepted the call at all, or would we have missed our opportunity to know you because of our fear of the unknown? I wonder if we would have heard the angel's voice, or would we have been watching television, listening to music, always remaining distracted by the things of the world—simply busy establishing our own plans?

I can only imagine how hard it must have been as a young woman to give up your dreams and desires for God's plan. I can only imagine how hard it must have been to carry a child knowing that one day He would have to go through unbelievable pain and agony for your sake. As a mother, it had to be extremely difficult to sacrifice yourself so that your child could accomplish His purpose on earth. As a mother who fought to be a mother, I admire your ability to be so self-sacrificing. You opened your body to receive a gift that you would later have to give to the world.

Your ability to allow God to bless you with something indescribable later gave us the ability to receive and understand indescribable blessings. As women, we now seek the impossible because you had the faith to birth the One who makes all things possible in an impossible way. A mother's love is indescribable, but a mother's sacrifice is priceless. You lovingly raised your child, preparing Him for His assignment of bringing salvation to the world, knowing fully that it would break your heart.

You, Mary, defied all odds, and fought a fight that no mother will ever be able to match. You, Mary, stood for the broken person, the hurting person, the lost person, and you produced salvation through yourself, for yourself and for the

world. Did you know that your baby boy would save you? Did you know that the life you gave to Him, He would turn around and give back to you? Did you know that you would birth faith for the faithless and healing for the broken? Did you truly know what it meant when the angel said you would give birth to Emmanuel? Did you know that you would also sacrifice your heart as a mother so that your Son could give His heart to the world?

What an amazing story, that you would give your body so that your Son could give His body as a living sacrifice. You are not just a mother, but a mother that birthed a gift for all. I would later develop the desire and the dream of becoming a mother to a son because of your sacrifice. Mary, because of your sacrifice, I am determined to fight for my promise of a child.

You, Mary, are the mother who made every other mother possible. You are the mother who made every gift possible. You are the mother who birthed salvation into the world because you accepted a gift that anyone else would have turned away. Mary, through you, we would develop hope and come to understand that sometimes our promises are only made manifest through the sacrifices of our hearts. Mary, we applaud you as the mother who won—and lost. We applaud you as the mother who birthed greatness so that we could receive the promise of His great reward and, yes, even our own greatness.

Dear Mary, thank you for accepting the call. Mary, you are what a mother is. You are what a mother does, and you

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are what every mother should strive to be. You taught us that mothering is not about us, but rather about guiding and nurturing our children so they are able to walk in God's chosen purpose for their lives. Mary, you taught us how to be a mother, and for that lesson we applaud you.

Cora Jakes-Coleman

Dear Mothers,

I don't think there is a group that compares themselves to each other more than mothers. The quest for guidance and approval leaves us observing the steps and patterns of motherhood very closely. One mother I've studied can be found beginning her journey in the New Testament.

The life of Mary has been so significant for me because history reveals that she was a teenage mother. Certainly the times were much different then, and teen pregnancy didn't have the same stigma it does now. However, there was something about a young girl being trusted with life that made me want to examine how she was able to survive mental, emotional, and physical attacks. I imagined that once the news of God's impregnating her began to circulate, she was called crazy and made to become an outcast. There is no woman in the Bible more fitting to give insight on becoming a mother under extraordinary circumstances than Mary.

When my children came to an age when they were no longer oohing and ahing in baby talk, I realized they were copying what they saw in me. My son has many of my mannerisms and has inherited my sense of humor. My daughter has much of my charisma and emulates my clothing style. I never sat them down and told them which parts of my personality to take. They'd learned more from what I didn't

say than any words I ever uttered. So when the time came to write this book for us, you and me, I knew the clues to the mentality of Mary would reside in the actions of Christ.

Of course, there would come a time when Christ was able to access God for himself, but through His infancy Mary and Joseph were entrusted to raise Him back to God. Imagine how easy it would have been to raise Him with no knowledge of the mandate on His life. Perhaps He would have been raised “normally” and would have never discovered the gifting inside of Him. There was a courageous commitment to share truth, whether or not it would be universally accepted. That same courage dwelled in Christ as He faced the Pharisees and converted the Gentiles. That courage exists in me. It exists in you. It exists in our children.

Sarah Jakes

1

anxious and pregnant



“Blessed is she who has believed that the
Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Luke 1:45



Dear Mary,

You know better than anyone that the gift of life is a miracle. In your case, an angel visited you, and instantaneously you were pregnant by the Holy Spirit. There's not a womb before you or since that can contend with that. But that doesn't downplay the biological miracle of pregnancy. A woman is born with one to two million eggs in her body. As a woman ages, those eggs begin to die off and decrease. The process of one of those eggs making contact with a man's sperm can only be described as a phenomenon.

Once a month a woman's ovary releases an egg. A man's sperm must fertilize that egg, or it will be discarded through her menstrual cycle. A man releases at least forty million sperm each time he ejaculates, yet only one will have the strength to travel through a woman's reproductive system and make contact with the egg. All of this must take place within twenty-four hours of the egg's release from the ovary, before the egg becomes unviable. From there the fertilized egg must travel to the woman's uterus, implant in the uterine wall, and then begin a nine-month process of development.

In a world inundated with adorable baby faces, tiny little clothes, and infant giggles, it can be easy to lose sight of the miraculous journey that must take place from conception to parenting. As a mother of two and stepmother to three,

dear mary

it doesn't escape me how humbling the gift of motherhood is. There's no way to fully explain the state of awe a woman finds herself in when she learns her body will transform a cluster of cells into a person. There are some questions that are universal regardless of your age, socioeconomic level, or marital status.

Is my body strong enough to handle this? Should I rest or push myself to continue like normal? What will the baby look like? When will I feel it kick? Who do I tell first? Should I wait to tell at all? How will my family react? Will my mother try to take over? Will this baby bridge the divide between my sister and me? How do I choose a doctor? Will the hospital nurses be nice? Baby names? Boy or girl? Baby shower?

Will I be prepared to handle all that lies ahead?

There are a million questions forming in the minds of expectant mothers. Swimming in a sea of excitement, anxiety, joy, fear, hope, and stress is a woman who knows that life has forever changed, but who can't pinpoint exactly when it will all begin. Most women begin to think of family or friends who've recently given birth or are a few months ahead of them in pregnancy. Their sisterhood of motherhood is a gift that only those brave enough to be vulnerable fully understand. There's much wisdom to be gleaned simply by having someone who understands exactly where you've been and what you're going through.

After experiencing my own pregnancies and sea of questions, I feel I understand you a bit better. Your sisterhood in motherhood was your cousin Elizabeth. As soon as you came to visit her after learning the news of your pregnancy, the baby inside her womb leaped. Before you could even begin to express to her your reaction, she described how blessed

you would be because you believed the Lord would fulfill His promises to you.

Initially, I didn't understand why it would be so difficult for you to believe; after all, an angel appeared to deliver your news. It would seem quite easy to believe after an experience like that. This just goes to show how much I've taken for granted the miracle of pregnancy. The reality is that much of the second-guessing women experience upon learning of their pregnancy is rooted in disbelief. Unsure of our ability to carry and nurture, we begin weighing all the possible mistakes or misfortune that we could experience. Yet you showed such courage and faith to trust that God would not set a miracle in motion without a plan for completion. What strength one must possess to see the answers to their questions by faith! For every hurdle, jungle, and mountain the trail of motherhood presents for us, God has made a provision that will allow our spirits to prosper in hope.

I certainly wish I could have found those words when I ended my call with my friend Misty two months ago. She was beginning to feel like it would take more than a miracle to adjust to becoming a mom again.

I can remember exactly what I was doing when I found out. She called me from her office at the firm where she works. Whispering into the receiver so that she couldn't be overheard, she asked, "What's your calendar like in April?"

"Misty, I don't even know what I'm eating for lunch today. I definitely don't know what I'm doing months from now," I replied.

She chuckled at my response before dropping the bomb, "Well, will you come visit me at the hospital? I'm going to have a baby. I hear the cafeteria has great food!"

Surprised at the announcement, I immediately screamed my congratulations at the top of my lungs. “WE’RE HAVING A BABY!!!” I yelled. After my exclamation, all I could hear was her laughing. I imagined her clamoring for buttons to turn the volume down on her office line while she giggled through the laundry list of questions I had: “How far along are you? When did you find out? What are you hoping for, and don’t just give me the ‘healthy baby’ line!” One-by-one in rapid-fire style, I asked her everything that came to mind.

Just as quickly she replied: “About five weeks. This morning. You’re the first person I called. A girl.”

After covering baby names and allowing me a ten-minute monologue expressing my envy that her stomach would no longer be confined by Spanx, girdles, and other control-top devices, we ended our call. I was so happy for her!

We grew up in church. We were taught to believe that babies are a blessing. Sure, there were complicated instances of new life coming into the world. Many a woman, like me, first held her child with no ring on her finger, and confused that sentiment a bit. On one hand, every life is a gift from God, but I believe it became difficult not to allow the sin to overcloud the joy. Too often we see the baby thrown out with the baby water. Luckily for Misty, she wouldn’t have to face any of those predicaments. She was doing things the “right” way.

I believe that’s why I was so surprised when I hung up from our latest call. She called me moments after I’d finished working out at the gym. I placed the phone on mute while I caught my breath and listened to my friend confide her secret fears to me. “Honestly, it’s hard to be excited about the baby these days. . . .”

I couldn't imagine what worries she had. Before she could finish her sentence, I began searching for any reason she should be disappointed or afraid. This would be baby number four for her, so she'd be pretty well prepared for what to expect. Misty was just about to celebrate her fifteen-year wedding anniversary. She wouldn't be worrying about the judgment that can come with being a single mother. I ran scenario after scenario through my head, and all I could see was a white picket fence.

When my mind stopped racing long enough to ask her what her concerns were, it all came out. Misty was having a hard time smiling about the baby when she was already consumed with worry about providing for the mouths outside of her tummy. They would have to find somewhere new to live, or make do with the limited space in their home. Her husband had lost his job about a year earlier, and finding consistent income proved to require more patience than either of them anticipated. She told me that she was doing the best she possibly could to be optimistic, but the last week had been particularly difficult to find the rainbow in the midst of her storm.

I'm hardly ever at a loss for words, but I truly didn't know what to tell her. I pacified her with the age-old responses I'm sure she was prepared to hear: "It'll all work out. Everything will be okay!" I continued to spew out every cliché I could find until she was the one convincing me that everything would work out. When we hung up the phone, I couldn't help but ask God why there was no clear formula to peace. While my friend, for all intents and purposes, did things the "right" way, she still had obstacles to face.

I was seeing her life through my insecurities. I assumed that, because she didn't have the struggles I was familiar

with, she didn't struggle at all. We miss the opportunity to be compassionate when we confine people to our own experiences. Misty helped me to realize that we aren't just puzzle pieces looking to create the perfect picture. We're souls seeking the strength to accept—in spite of how we've been bent and curved—that our life still has purpose.

Life is difficult when you have an audience to watch you battle, but it's dangerous when you have an internal battle no one can witness. My life was difficult as a young teen mom. All I desired was to get married so that I wouldn't feel the haunting judgment from others. I couldn't pretend everything was okay, because the evidence of life had already dispelled that myth.

What do you do when you have a life someone else would envy, but you can't bear to admit that it's not as easy as it looks? It's hard to not feel the distress that comes with

bringing a life into the world when you consider the potential calamity he or she will have to face. We are expected to create an environment where our children can grow and flourish under our care. But often we're too stifled by our own insecurities to allow them any room to grow. Having given up on ourselves, our task becomes to at minimum

provide better for them than we had for ourselves.

I will never forget visiting my mother in the middle of a difficult time in my first marriage. I hadn't said a word, but when my mother saw my face and then peered into the eyes of my daughter, she knew something was wrong. At that

We miss the opportunity to be compassionate when we confine people to our own experiences.

time she warned me that if I didn't come out of my depression, I was going to take my daughter into it with me. My daughter, Makenzie, was emulating the expressions of my pain—no matter how well I thought I was doing at shielding her. The reality is, you can't constantly be around someone without their seeing every part of you, even the parts that still hurt.

If you do not confront your pain, you will spread it. My dear friend was giving me the opportunity to fight with her, but I couldn't see beyond my own scars. When she mentioned her frustrations, I felt my own issues leap, but I didn't tell her that. Our situations were

very different. I didn't feel my experiences would be relatable to her. I wanted to give Misty some type of confirmation that even though things looked problematic on paper, God would work things out. I just didn't believe sharing what happened on the inside of *me* would help her. I knew reviving her faith wasn't about just her but about the lives observing her as well

We can't be faithless and raise faithful children.

Mary, when Gabriel informed you that God had chosen you to carry His Son, He also revealed that your cousin Elizabeth was expecting as well. Though you were just receiving the news, she was already six months pregnant. Sometimes those closest to us face obstacles before we do so that we can learn from them. We can't be ashamed to share our lessons even though we know everyone's test will be different. I felt guilty. I wanted to give Misty a reason to believe, but I couldn't see beyond my own past.

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children.*

You could've felt bitterness that Elizabeth was already married when she conceived. Elizabeth could've envied you that she wasn't chosen to give birth to Christ. Elizabeth was older and had been barren. You were young and a virgin. Gabriel visited you to inform you of your pregnancy, but he had visited Elizabeth's husband to deliver their news. Amid all the similarities, there were these small but significant differences. Still, your faith to believe was the divine bond that held you together.

Gabriel used Elizabeth's pregnancy to underscore to you that nothing is impossible with God (see Luke 1:37). Your salutation to Elizabeth after learning the news of your future child filled her with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:41). There was no way you could know what happened on the inside of her unless she was willing to be vulnerable enough to share it with you. You never would have suspected that your words filled

her with joy until she told you. The transparency in your friendship afforded you the opportunity to confirm one another's faith.

That's what I want to do with Misty. That's all I desire to do with my children. I want my little ones to enjoy seeing their fears in the rearview mirror of their destiny.

One day my children will realize

that anxiety magnifies the size of our obstacles, but faith gives us the power to rise above our struggles. Love builds a tunnel from one soul to another. We must be careful what we let in and sure about what we release. When we feel those we are connected to are allowing fear into their hearts, we can combat it by allowing more faith, love, and hope to gush through

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our channel. Our fears can drown in the flood of our promise, but we must be willing to believe. We can't become like those who choose to let fear dilute the power of their promise.

The leap in my womb may be the confirmation someone else needs that she can believe. More than cliché reassurances of a better tomorrow, through transparency we offer our scars as evidence of survival. Sharing those imperfections with your children can be very scary. One day I'll ask you how you received the courage to tell Jesus your own truth, but until then, I want to thank you for sharing your moment with another believing woman. Elizabeth answered your question of "Why me?" with one simple answer: Because you believed.

*If we are wise, we
will build children with
only the bricks God
hands us, not the rocks
life has thrown at us.*

I am learning that many of the rights and wrongs of motherhood come down to what we believe to be true. If we are wise, we will build children with only the bricks God hands us, not the rocks life has thrown at us. We will choose to believe God. No statistic, employer, bank statement, or matter of paternity can rob us of our promise. Unless we choose to believe it can.

We can't tell our children how to believe. We can only demonstrate how. I once believed in fear. I even believed in pain. I began to doubt love. I saw my hope slipping away, but then I was reminded that I had little eyes watching and small hearts in my hands. I may not be the best math tutor they'll ever have. I can't guarantee each meal will be a hit. But I pray each day that I will model a walk of faith for them and all those with whom I'm connected.