

Christine Jeske
N7770 Kettle Moraine Dr.
Whitewater, WI 53190
acjeske@gmail.com

**CRAVING PURE SPIRITUAL MILK:
NOURISHMENT FOR THE NEW MOTHER'S SOUL**

By Christine Jeske

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Motherhood—a most wonderful, wild, exhausting, and elating adventure. You've made it through those nine months of sickness and tiredness, achy back and swollen feet and endless anticipation. You've chosen baby wallpaper, cribs, strollers, and everything you could ever wish for and more, which now piles up in that

room designated “nursery,” and now... why does it feel like you haven’t arrived anywhere? You still feel tired, you still can’t remember that aunt’s name on the tip of your tongue or the phone message your husband told you ten minutes ago, and now if your back doesn’t ache you’re too busy rocking the baby to sleep or too distracted by sore nipples to notice. Maybe somewhere in this motherhood thing you are finding all you ever hoped for and more, but most of the time you’re too blown away by the “more” to notice the “all you ever hoped for.” For better or for worse, it’s more than any of us ever hoped for.

That’s why I wrote this book. Not because I’m a theologian, a pediatrician, or a child psychologist, but because I’m a mother like you, figuring things out as I go along like you. I don’t know all the answers or all about your life, but I’m learning how to see my own life. And what I see—when I really stop to look—is magnificent. And I know your life is magnificent, too. But you won’t see it unless you’re looking.

Motherhood is magnificent. Mary’s speech when she found out she would be a mother (to the greatest child of all time, no less), has been called the “Magnificat.”

My soul glorifies (magnifies) the Lord
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
For the Mighty One has done great things for me—
Holy is His name.

When Mary realized the full meaning of her pregnancy, she saw the magnificence of God working in her life. She was filled with joy in the depths of her spirit because she saw the great things He had done for her, even though she never saw herself as great. And she learned, in this, to know His holiness. That's what I want for myself, and for you.

You don't have to be Mary, Mother of God's Son, to have God be part of your life as a mother. I believe parenting can be more full of analogies about God and humans than anything else we do in life. We open the Bible and find words about mothering.

God's first command given to woman and man is to reproduce. The curse given to Eve in the garden is wrapped up in childbearing and her offspring—that Eve's children will suffer from the evil snake but one day crush that snake's head. There in Genesis are the beginnings of all there is to know about raising children: we raise children under God's blessing, in spite of our disobedience, through temptation, and into redemption. When Paul wrote of women, "they will be saved through childbirth," I wonder whether he meant that through childbirth and mothering we have examples from which to learn every lesson God has to teach. This book is about examining life as a mother, and examining what God says to us, and finding how each enlightens the other.

I've also made this book to fit into your life as a mother, because trust me, I know most things that used to fit into your life aren't fitting so neatly now. You can read a section or two during the snatches of time when a baby nurses, naps, rocks, or wiggles on the floor.

I composed this book during my own snatches of time, mostly while nursing, and writing it gives me faith that you, too, can make the most of your now fragmented life. I

made it my discipline to write once a day for the first three months of my daughter's life, and every other day for the next nine months. This book contains some of the treasures I found, but for you the treasures most meaningful will be the ones you find in your own life.

I challenge you to not merely read this book, but to use it to motivate your own search for God's fingerprints in your mothering life. After each section I've included a "Food For Thought" or "Challenge to Action" to get you started thinking about your own life. My hope is that at some time during each day you'll ask yourself, "What have I learned about my baby today? What have I learned about myself? And what have I learned about God?"

There's too much to learn, see, and feel to the fullest to just let these days slip by. So let us begin—to look at our children and at our selves, and to see God in the story He is writing through our lives.

CHAPTER ONE: God Who Breaks Through

Much of our lives we live among walls. We live as if in a comfy stone cottage where we know where everything is, and we decide who and what comes in and goes out, and there aren't too many surprises to shake us up. It's safe.

And then something happens, like having a baby. Suddenly those walls start cracking. There's wind and dirt and who knows what coming in through those cracks, and our comfy cottage looks a mess. But at the same time there's light coming through, and some warm breezes, and unexpected treasures blowing in when we least expect them.

There's a word for this in the Old Testament. *Perez*. It means "breaking through." One woman named her baby *Perez*. Later when God shocked everybody by striking people dead they named the place *Perez*. Then King David won a battle and named that place *Baal-Perez*: God-Who-Breaks-Through.

We have a God who loves to *perez*. He loves to break into our lives, like wind through a crack, shocking us with His power, light, and whatever He decides we need just then. And we might as well brace ourselves, say goodbye to our comfy stone cottages, and welcome Him in, because God loves to break through to new moms.

In this chapter you'll have a chance to think about some of the ways God breaks through your life as a new mother. He breaks through our life plans, being the only One who truly decides when a couple will conceive. He breaks through our threshold of comfort with the raw pain of childbirth. He breaks through eternity with the creation of this new soul, a soul created with the ability to choose Him and join Him in heaven one day.

The first year of motherhood is a time when life gets stripped to the basics. I pray that in this time of basics and beginnings, God will break into your life like never before.

Where Babies Come From

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart.*

-Jeremiah 1:5

“It’s a baby. We have a baby.”

“Do you want to touch her?”

These were the first pathetic words my husband and I spoke when our daughter Phoebe was born. But what can a person say in the presence of a miracle? Remember the story of Peter on the mountain watching Jesus meeting with Elijah and Moses who had been dead for generations, stuttering out “Can I get you a tent?” What do we say? What can we say to describe the miracle that is Life? We sit there staring at those tiny fingernails, ready for a clipping; those eyes that blink and roll and make the goofiest expressions; those little sucking lips; this creature looking up, needing us.

My daughter came into existence in such a bizarre and giddily laughable manner that there was never any doubt that she was anything but a miracle. I’d like to tell you this story because I believe it will help you understand just how unlikely a person I am to ever be writing this book. This is my story of the God of great Love who planned motherhood and so many other good things for each of our lives.

A doctor told me before I got married that I would likely find it difficult to have children. The possibility was never zero, but it was slight. I simply didn’t have cycles more than once or twice a year, completely unpredictably. So my husband and I agreed

this was a fine part of God's plan, and when our careers and education made everything fit conveniently, we could begin to think about adopting.

We went on with our lives for five lovely years. We lived for a year in a Nicaraguan village with no running water, no health care, and no insurance. We came back to the U.S. to sort out what God had in store for us next. This, to my disappointment and terror, seemed every day to be pointing more and more toward China. I had no desire to go to China, but my husband was fascinated by witnessing, English teaching, and grad school opportunities there, and more importantly, he told me that trump card of trump cards: "God *told* me we should go." I spent a lot of hours crying to God, asking for some hint of passion to travel to China, and all I got was His whispering assurance, "Trust me blindly. Have faith, and you will understand some day."

How little I understood. We went on with applications and arrangements that would set us up for two years in China. All the while I held in my heart a secret, desperate hope, or dread. "We won't go to China," I told myself, "because something life-shattering will happen. Like... I'll get pregnant."

Well, as far as I knew I didn't get pregnant, and the days were ticking down until departure. I did get sick for a few weeks, and I told more friends than I can remember, "At least I'm not pregnant. I can't imagine any worse time in my life to be pregnant."

Three weeks before our plane would leave for China, we made a trip to Nicaragua to visit the village we had lived in. There in an exquisitely beautiful and yet dirt poor village at the top of a mountain, I lay on a plastic cot one morning trying to fall back to sleep before the sun rose. My hands rested on my belly, which felt more stuffed than

usual after many generous plates of greasy rice and beans served by our Nicaraguan friends. Then I noticed something. That wasn't just fat. There, deep in my belly, was a grapefruit sized lump.

“Adam,” I whispered to my husband, nearly in tears. “Come feel this.”

He did, acknowledging this was certainly not normal. “What do you think it is?”

“It's either a tumor or a baby,” I said, not wanting to voice the thought I couldn't shake: I'd rather it be a tumor. A tumor I could remove and go on with my life. But a baby? No, I absolutely did not want to be a mother. I was going to be an English teacher in China. It was far too late to back down on that, as we would be back home in the U.S. for only two nights before flying out again to China. And I was enrolled in grad school classes, and... I had so many other dreams that now threatening to shatter.

Adam seemed unshaken. “Well,” he said, “no use worrying about it until we can get it checked out by a doctor.”

Right. As if that's possible for a woman who has just discovered a grapefruit in her abdomen. I thought of little else. And so it was that two nights later, just after sunset, when a village without electricity is already preparing for sleep, I sat down on the back porch of the barn-like building where we slept and stared out over the valley miles below. Adam was inside reading by candlelight, and I found myself alone with God.

Now there's something I must explain about Nicaraguan weather. For over six months of the year, from around October until May, it simply does not rain. Their dry season is *dry*. During the year we had lived in Nicaragua, I saw rain only once during the dry season, and it was a sprinkle in March when the rains were already on their way

back. But now it was December, smack in the middle of the dry season. It simply didn't rain.

Or so I thought. As I sat there, steaming with frustration over the mess my life had become and wishing I weren't so mad about this possible little baby in my belly that I knew I was supposed to be happy about, I noticed a wind passing through the trees. And then I felt a cool touch on my toes. And then I realized what was happening. It was raining.

That rain, I believe, was sent by God for one purpose: to tell me how much He loved me. I sat there, weeping in the rain, knowing just how much God cared for me. "Christine," He was saying, "I can control all creation—the wind and rain and so much more. Do you not believe I am in control of your life? Do you not believe I planned this because I love you?"

And that is exactly what He has done. I scrapped my secret prayers that this would turn out to be a benign tumor, and set my heart to trusting God. Three days later, on what turned out to be Christmas day, Adam and I returned to a major city of Nicaragua and took a pregnancy test. Sure enough, it came out brightly positive. But an even greater shock awaited us the next day.

A friend directed us to a clinic where we could get an ultrasound for the amazing Nicaraguan health care price of ten U.S. dollars and 50 cents. We noted in wonder that if we had tried this in the U.S., our current insurance plan would not have covered any of the hundreds of dollars in prenatal visits. So it was that a Nicaraguan nurse first showed us the dancing legs of the tiny baby in my abdomen, made some measurements, and informed us that our baby was 18 and a half weeks along.

It wasn't until we stepped out of the clinic that Adam's shock subsided long enough for him to make the calculation. "That's *four and a half months!*"

God, in His infinite love and glorious humor, kept our baby a secret from us for entirely half the pregnancy. I believe He did this for more reasons than I will ever understand, but among the outcomes were getting me to China, saving us money we didn't have for health care, and teaching us what blind faith really means. God sees plans we never see, and He never creates by accident.

Food For Thought: What was special about the arrival of your baby? Timing? Health? Finances? Delivery? First appearance? How have you seen God breaking into your life by placing this child in your life?

Labor

Now, like a woman in childbirth,

I cry out, I gasp and pant.

I will lay waste the mountains and hills

and dry up all their vegetation.

I will turn rivers into islands

and dry up the pools...

These are the things I will do.

-Isaiah 42: 15-16

“UUUUUUUUUGGHH!”

It’s something like that. There’s not really a word for it, though. You know it if you’ve lived it, and that’s about the only way. Those early cramps grow into contractions until you’re squeezing your husband’s hand and thinking it couldn’t possibly get any worse than this, and then it does get worse, culminating in that unbelievably excruciating stage called “pushing.” For me it lasted only a few minutes, but I know I had it easy. There’s a reason women choose painkillers.

At the time I couldn’t imagine that pain lasting a minute longer than it did. But the experience is more than pain. What amazed me at the time wasn’t so much the pain as the power. What I felt was an unquenchable urge surging through my body making it impossible to do anything but the thing I was there for—to create.

A few days after Phoebe was born, I read in Isaiah, “the Lord lays waste to mountains with the grunts of a woman in labor.” With that feeling of grunting out a baby still fresh in my mind, I read these words in amazement. God destroys like that? And if that is how he destroys, was that also how he created?

When God spoke the words that brought forth sea, land, mountains, moon, trees, fish, and a man with ribs and speech, what kind of “words” were they? I don’t believe any more that it was a simple “Be!” with a smile and a nonchalant wave of the hand like a magician bored by his own wand. No—I believe now that it was birth in all the glory of birth. It was a thundering grunting groaning pushing-because-everything-in-the-universe-and-all-that-is-true-says “PUSH!” kind of word. It was God bearing down, working so hard He, even He, had to rest. We’re not here in any trifling little craft fair. We’re here in the hospital room of a hard labor well worked.

And then, when I think that the Word of God today is the Word of that same Mother-Birther who grunted out the universe and lays waste to mountains as He pleases, it nearly scares me to open my Bible. Who ever was it who first dared to call this book on my shelf the Word of God? Moses heard the voice of God and his face glowed. Elijah heard the voice of God in a whisper more poignant than all the fires and earthquakes and tornadoes the world could throw at him. Am I really ready to hear that voice speaking into my life? Am I ready to watch the next steps unfolding in His grunting creation?

Challenge to Action: If you haven't given birth yet, use a Bible with a concordance to copy down verses about God's power, including the power and sustenance He gives is during trials. Take your list of verses with you to the delivery room. If you have already given birth, make a similar list for the nights you spend awake with your baby.

Welcome to Life

The Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written:

Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children;

Break forth and cry aloud,

You who have no labor pains;

Because more are the children of the desolate woman

Than of her who has a husband.

-Galatians 4:26-27

Recently my husband and I met with a couple of friends for a Bible study.

Together we read these verses from the first chapter of John:

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

The husband of the couple pointed out something about the miracle of new birth in Christ, and I decided to tell the story of how I felt when Phoebe was born.

I didn’t cry when I first saw the baby. Maybe I was too much in shock, my legs still trembling from adrenaline and exertion. It wasn’t until I watched the nurses cleaning that little crying girl in her hospital cradle, hearing the song “Great is Thy Faithfulness” that happened to be playing on the CD we brought, that I began to cry. “Welcome to the world, little friend,” my heart whispered to her. “We’re so glad to see you here.” And I recognized that the joy I felt at greeting my new daughter into this world, the purity of my acceptance, was something like what God must feel when a new child enters his family.

“You could just hang out in the maternity ward all day and tell that story,” the husband said, and I noticed tears in his wife’s eyes also. I was surprised to see them so moved. It wasn’t until just before they went home that they explained what more was on their minds that day.

“I guess I should share.” The woman’s voice was shaking. “My period was two weeks late this month. I had done a pregnancy test, but we still thought maybe. We just found out today.” Her face muscles squeezed into a smile to hold back tears. For the last two years we had prayed with this couple for a child, and we could see their agony in facing another month with almost—but not—a baby.

That day I saw the other side of the story—how God feels when he waits for a child, and the child doesn’t come. Month after month, year after year—waiting.

Four months later the couple came knocking at our door. “We wanted to tell you something,” the husband said, and in an instant I guessed by the suppressed grins on their faces what news they had.

Pregnant! We spun around the room and exchanged hugs all around. What a glorious feeling to be pregnant after years of waiting—they glow, bubble, and barely sleep. He talks to her belly. They tell a few people at a time but think of it every minute of the day.

And this is the celebration in heaven when a child is reborn into the heavenly family! This is what Jesus was trying to explain when he told about the father throwing a party for the lost son, and the woman throwing a party because she found the coin she had lost. As deeply as those couples pray who hope for a child, so fervently is Jesus hoping for those who have not yet been reborn to Him. As great as birth into this world is, greater still is our second birth into the Arms welcoming us from heaven.

Challenge to Action: Have you been “born of God?” If not, consider praying simply that God would take you into His family. If you already know this joy, think of specific

people you know who do not yet know God. Pray for them, meditating on God's yearning for their new birth.

Sleep Comes Again

And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Genesis 1:5

All day the waves washed over me in a long dark storm. All day I held on, but when night fell, my fingers clutching my craggy rock of optimism and self-determination slipped off. Into the waters I fell, and I might have drifted off to sea, if it were not for He who will not let us drown in the stormy seas.

I'm still not sure what stomach ache or ear ache or muscle joint back neck finger toe ache it was afflicting Phoebe, I know only that she would cry when she laid down, sleep only lightly, and squirm and whimper as she nursed. And all this meant steady pressing stress on me, her nearest company. The last time I nursed her at night I noted that the stress must be getting to me because I looked around and realized *everything* annoyed me, from my sweaty stocking feet to the bright fluorescent lights to the sound of my husband breathing to the pages of the Bible that stuck together, and the fact that I couldn't think of any place in that Bible that would give me the comfort I so desperately wanted. When we turned off the lights I cried. There, with my husband holding me, I let go of the signboard I had held that said "I'm okay."

The last thought I remember before falling asleep and the first thought waking me in the morning were the same: “she’s crying again...” I lay in bed hoping vaguely that she would fall back asleep for another hour—at least until 6:30—but her cries weren’t getting any quieter.

I nursed her, bathed her, took a shower myself, rocked her, and tucked her back in bed as her eyes began to close. Her crying lasted only a minute. Then I sat down and opened my Bible, knowing here, now, I was meeting God.

If ever I have doubted whether there is One who answers prayers, I knew then that it is true. I see in my mind the face of my husband as he held me in the dark, and hear in my mind the silent words he spoke to above, and I know that someone answered that call. Peace comes, like a river perhaps, or more like seagulls skimming the calm seawaters after a storm. Like the smell of baby shampoo on her head, like the feel of my skin soft again after too long without showering made my scalp itchy and oily. Today, I am cleaned inside. Soft, clean, dry, bright, this is my soul today, and that’s all I ask for now.

She always goes to sleep again. This fact I must remember. There is an end to every day, a cycle, because we need it. Babies always go to sleep again. Even on the day she rolls out of bed and gets a goose egg on her head. Even on the day she vomits on somebody else’s car. Even when you’ve tried everything and company’s over and she’s over tired and wailing one minute and happily throwing toys in the air the next and she’s been awake for nine hours straight—still, she will sleep again. And so will you.

Food for Thought: Thank God for planning the world since the beginning to run on day-long cycles, with rest for every day. Thank God that all difficulties have an end.

Love of Galaxies

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,

your faithfulness to the skies...

How priceless is your unfailing love!

-Psalm 36:5,7

We love kissing that little round soft forehead. Sometimes when I picture myself talking to my child as a teenager, I still picture myself somehow leaning down to kiss her on the forehead at the start of every conversation. How wonderful if it could be this way! If this were my attitude always, this same sweet love as for a newborn, this same assumption of innocence. Most teenagers would never go out in public if their mother kissed them every minute on the forehead, but how can I incorporate the attitude of a kiss into my every conversation?

Now, when love for our newborns is easy, memorize that feeling of the kiss of sweet mothering love. There will come times when we need to unpack it later in life. This same sweet baby may one day come home drunk, skip school, or want to buy that too-short dress. Now we must learn, in every conversation and action, to give that gentle kiss to the forehead with our heart, then speak. And in our learning to love our babies, we are learning also how God loves us.

One morning soon after Phoebe was born, I lay her on a blanket and turned on some music while I took a shower. As I stepped out of the shower, I nearly ran to see

her. One of my favorite songs, about the love of a father for his child, played on the CD. And there was Phoebe, her blanket tucked up under her chin, little hands open and at rest, asleep in the arms of peace.

I found myself kneeling down beside her and crying. As I knelt, the words of the song reminded me of my own Father in heaven and how He must feel. With all angels singing in choruses of perfect truth and harmony, while all the galaxies spin around us, He bends down from His throne and looks at us.

I must have heard a thousand times the story of the prodigal son, whose father runs to see his child. And I've read the Bible verse about the angels in heaven who always see the face of the Father in heaven as they watch over little children. But now as a mother I'm learning about parenting through the emotions of my own heart. At times my heart bursts with love, and yet I realize my love is only the tiniest droplet of all His oceans of love. Catch a glimpse of Him, so huge and knowing, smiling at His children so small and innocent, and we are blown away.

Challenge to Action: Take ten minutes to journal, write a poem, or write a letter to your child about the love you have felt at his or her birth.

Let the Mothers Come to Me

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

-Luke 18:16

Having a baby is no easy road to take. Don't let anyone tell you it will be easy to suddenly start setting aside all your own dreams and goals and what you used to call "your needs" for the sake of this little one. That little one looks up at you all smiling and innocent as if to say, "What? What did I do?" And with tears in your eyes you want to say "nothing, honey", but really the answer is "Everything. You, little one, turned my world upside-down."

Postpartum depression never hit me in the first months, but something like it did knock me over the head when Phoebe was about four months old. My husband and I were both asked to go on a week long vacation, involving long hours on buses and far too many in-and-out stops at tourist attractions to subject a baby to. And so there I stood, face to face with the reality that my husband would go off into the wide world of adventure without me, and I would stay home with the baby. Life goes on without me, and I am left with what my culture calls "no life." The walls close in. I hate being told what to do, especially when it has anything to do with my being a woman. I hate this all—being left alone with no voice and no weapons to fight against the powers and principalities that tie me down to a little chair and laugh at me.

Some days the pressure of jealousy seemed to splash all around me like waves on a boat, searching for that crack to rush in and sink me. On one day just after my husband went back to work after his summer off as a teacher, a trickle of jealousy passed through me as I thought of how my day was spent compared to that of my husband. He had gone out for most of the morning and afternoon, shopping and walking and seeing new places

with friends. And I had spent the morning leaving the apartment only for a couple of minutes to buy sweet potatoes. The rest of the time I spent in the never-ending cycles of changing, feeding, rocking, entertaining, and nursing my little girl, who happened to be especially fussy. It seemed that my day had been a waste. Another day in these never ending cycles.

Around the same time all this had been happening, I had been reading and rereading the passage about Jesus blessing the little children, feeling I should write something about it but having no idea what. Finally on this day when I gave my husband permission to take a vacation without me, I recognized this: By blessing the little children, Jesus blessed mothers too. If my child, my daily work and my calling, is blessed, then so am I.

Picture yourself in that story for a minute. You are a mother taking her baby to see Jesus. I think of Chinese women who don't leave the house with their babies at all for nearly half a year, and I wonder, in Jesus' time, did some of these women walk further than they had in months or years to come to Jesus? Picture the men standing near Jesus glaring at you—"Get back to your home, there's important business going on here." Imagine you have already turned around, with tears in your my eyes, your heart sinking and shoulders hunched around the child in your arms, resigned to return home as "a good woman should."

And then you hear him calling, "No, let them come to me." And he blesses your child. His hands touch the baby and he tells everyone around that this, your work, is among the greatest work there is.

Jesus essentially is whispering to you, even now, “I am the light that comes right into your home that can feel so tomblake. I have swept you into the life you lead now because it suits you far better than any of your selfish routines and plans could. This little child, though small, is a whole universe. With this child you stand at the gate of all the kingdom of heaven.”

Food For Thought: Have you felt jealous of your husband, friends, or others whose lives seem freer than yours? What does it mean to you that Jesus welcomes you in a special way as a mom?