

A NEW MOM'S DEVOTIONAL

Expectant

Faith, Encouragement, and Grace for
New and Expectant Mothers

Julie Sanders

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Expectant: A New Mom's Devotional—Faith, Encouragement, and Grace for New and Expectant Mothers

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Published by Market Refined Publishing

193 Cleo Circle

Ringgold GA 30736

marketrefinedmedia.com

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Print ISBN: 979-8-9924512-0-7

Digital ISBN: 979-8-9924512-1-4

Audio ISBN: 979-8-9924512-2-1

LCCN: 2025901027

Cover and Interior Design by Nelly Murariu at PixBeeDesigns.com

Manuscript Edits by Sandra Peoples of Next Step Editing, and
Market Refined Publishing

Printed in the United States of America

Second Edition: March 2025

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Introduction

Dear sweet new mom or mom-to-be,

If you're reading this book, then you must have an expectant heart. You either long to be on the journey of motherhood, or you've already begun. Because I know first-hand what great joy comes with becoming a mommy, I want to encourage those of you just starting out.

From one mother's heart to another, I want you to know God has a tender heart for mothers and will be with us every baby step of the way. To understand why I already love you and am praying for you as you become a mom, I want to share a little of how I know firsthand the pleasure and the pain of an expectant heart.

The night we decided to try for a baby, we ate cheeseburgers and smiled more widely than the sesame buns on our plates. Thinking it was the right time in so many ways, we agreed to take the parenting plunge. We had no idea what awaited.

While I carried our child, I also carried ideas, hopes, and assumptions about how my arrival into motherhood would unfold. Following all the doctor's orders, planning for the baby's arrival, and listening to a chorus of well-meaning wisdom, we had no reason to think our expectations were unrealistic.

We signed up for birthing classes like all good parents-to-be, but I decided I didn't need to stay for the session covering emergency deliveries and C-sections. After all, we expected a smooth end to my pregnancy. I anticipated working as a first-grade teacher right up until my due date, delivering with my doctor, staying briefly in the hospital, recovering quickly while I lost my baby weight, and enjoying our sweet newborn in the first miraculous weeks together.

After marking off the thirty-eighth week on my planner, I went to bed feeling like a beluga whale. Before daylight dawned, we knew something wasn't right. Nothing happened like the books described or like we'd planned. We hurried to the hospital on icy roads, where an unpredictable, out of the ordinary story unfolded.

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The sleepy doctor broke the news that I was having a placental abruption. He shouted for a new shift of medical staff to hurry to the operating room where Jeff, my husband, put me on the table and held my hand as I lost consciousness. I wasn't aware of the moment they pulled our limp baby from my belly and whisked her off to revive her. Her first delicate days of life were spent across town at a neonatal intensive care unit, while I fought to hold on with little memory of how the pregnancy ended. Hushed visitors came and prayed and went. None of it resembled the images we'd dreamed about.

It wasn't until I became pregnant, waited thirty-eight weeks, delivered our first-born, and began to mother her, that I realized I'd been swollen with my own expectations. The first pages of our baby book looked nothing like what we'd anticipated; our first fragile months were filled with help from family and friends. We tried to salvage joy from our dashed plans. I struggled to even recognize myself or feel any bond with the baby I had carried. I grieved the harsh difference between our dreams and our reality.

Eventually, the miracle of new life and the joy of our child overshadowed the hard things and the disappointments. Discovery overcame depression, and healing of body, heart, and mind set in. Painful realities faded into our family history, and we moved on to the wide and welcoming journey of being parents.

As our little one grew, so did our ability to look back, be grateful, and sift out the blessings. Today, that little girl baby has grown into a young woman with hopes and expectations of her own.

Becoming a mother is not an easy task. It rarely unfolds as we think it will, but it also seldom leaves disappointment. No woman knows how her own story will be written, but God provides all we need to meet the challenges of motherhood with wisdom and joy. It's going to be better than you ever imagined, so enter in with a heart that is expectant.

Expectant with you,

Julie



Part One: You

Feeling Your Changes



I couldn't believe it. "That's her? That's it? No, really, where's the real one?" I didn't even bother to take a picture.

As the ferry approached Liberty Island, I leaned over the railing to see the magnificent view of the mammoth site I'd anticipated. Catching my first glimpse of the famous Statue of Liberty, my jaw dropped. From my earliest years, my mind archived images of the iconic symbol, creating a setting, size, and appearance I assumed were all accurate. The moment of arrival left me feeling rather duped and disappointed, wondering how I could've missed the realities of Lady Liberty. It was only in being there that I grasped her true proportions and the position of the world-renowned gift. My expectations were a distant cousin to the truth I discovered.

Before a woman knows it, she begins to tuck images and thoughts about motherhood into her mind and heart. Expectations of how motherhood will look and feel take shape as a doll-toting little girl grows into a pubescent teenager, into a young woman, and then an adult. Interference from fairytales and novels and full-color glossy catalogs makes matters worse. Throw in a baby-bearing friend who puts on a mask of perfection, and an expectant mom may set herself up for a lot of disappointment, guilt, and confusion.

It may not be until she embarks on the journey of child-bearing that a woman realizes how unfamiliar her mothering route feels. After

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months pass in anticipation and she arrives at destination motherhood, a first-time mommy might wonder at how different reality is from what she envisioned. “No, really, where’s the real one?”

A woman’s lifetime of expectations prepares her for motherhood, but those expectations don’t predict her circumstances. Each parent’s journey is unique. Some arrive via the biological route without a heavy struggle. Some pray long and wait. Some experience infertility’s challenges. Some dig deep furrows of grief through loss. Some seem to be made for pregnancy, only to face unexpected complications. Some mothers give up their children, only to have them born anew in the hearts of adoptive parents. No birthing plan ensures it all goes “as planned.” No journey is the same. Expectations never promise a mother what her way will be.

Each day in motherhood surprises us, so it makes sense the journey there would be the same. Instead of making statements about what will be or what we will have or what will happen, a realistic mom prepares her heart and opens her hands to the way God has for her. He won’t be surprised by whatever lies ahead for mother and child, and He’ll be there for whatever our mom-paths hold.

It was a parent who experienced great grief who declared, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (Job 23:10). That’s a promise you can expect to have fulfilled, and it’s quite a guarantee. After all, Lady Liberty is just copper; I’ve seen her, and now I know.

Enjoy the journey on the way to motherhood. Open your eyes and take in every detail. Lean over the railing so you don’t miss a thing. You really can’t imagine what’s ahead, but you can be sure it’s greater and more amazing than anything you expected.



WORDS TO GROW YOUR HEART

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.”
Psalm 37:5

THOUGHTS TO TREASURE AND SHARE

- ✦ What has influenced your ideas most about what motherhood will be like? A movie? A book? Another person?
- ✦ Describe what you think your baby will look and act like. What will you act like as a mom? Your husband as a dad?
- ✦ What are your expectations of the part God will play in your motherhood?



2 Uncomfortable and Unattractive

There are some really cute pregnancy clothes out there. If you time it right and conceive after your girlfriend delivers, you can enjoy her chic hand-me-downs. Some women look forward to baby bump fashions and, along with the mommy-to-be glow, look great pregnant. Most women reach a place where the mirror is their enemy and “uncomfortable and unattractive” is the only honest response to the unending “How do you feel?” questions from people who can’t wait to hold your baby.

In my ninth month, I wondered if my body would ever return to my pre-pregnancy condition. I felt guilty that it mattered to me, but it did. Gone were the days of the first trimester when I proudly snapped profiles photos of my belly to share. As the months labored on, clothes stretched tightly around my enormous bump, and my belly button protruded. Nothing familiar fit anymore. No one longs to be uncomfortable and unattractive, but there may be days on the gestational journey when we feel that way. Can’t we be both pregnant and beautiful?

Yes, we can, and we are. From God’s perspective and the perspective of our proud mates, the changes in our bodies represent miracles we’re all a part of. It’s a blessing on our marriages and a promise for our futures, a smile of God in our lives. So why does the “big bump stage” of the process feel so unlovely?

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Other than the fact that we may become physically uncomfortable in real ways, the world around us sets us up to believe “very pregnant” doesn’t go with “beautiful.” When models strap on small baby bumps for prego-wear photo shoots, no one makes sure to add padding to their breasts, swelling around their ankles, or width to their hips; the views we’re shown aren’t always true. Expectant moms need a big dose of truth.

To grow the inner maturity it takes to mother another person, we can “no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,” (Ephesians 4:14-15). If we’re to resist the cunning marketing and deceit of what beauty really looks like, we must turn our thoughts expectantly to God’s truth. Throw in those extra hormones that keep growing with each trimester, and we must guard against misunderstanding well-meaning comments and gracefully accept truth spoken in love, knowing that the truth is—our changing bodies are beautiful. Like we choose to faithfully take pre-natal vitamins, we must choose to think on “whatever is true . . .” (Philippians 4:8).

For a time in our pregnancies, our bump will be prominent and we’ll be bigger than normal. Our bodies will change, and we may even be uncomfortable. We’ll physically become someone new. And we’ll be beautiful.



WORDS TO GROW YOUR HEART

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8

THOUGHTS TO TREASURE AND SHARE

- ✦ What does your baby bump say to you and to others?
- ✦ How are you feeling about the physical changes your body is experiencing?
- ✦ Write a statement describing the beautiful truth about your body right now.

About Julie Sanders



Julie Sanders lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband Jeff. Before she made her home among the juniper trees, Julie was a teacher, women's ministry director, co-founder of an anti-trafficking ministry, and leader in early learning. Without question, being a mother of her daughter and son has been her favorite role.

Now that their two babies are grown, Julie says the motherhood journey exceeded all she imagined. Hard-won lessons have stayed with her while sojourning and serving families around the world. As a communicator, storyteller, and teacher, Julie loves creating truth-filled, practical tools that speak to the needs of people. Julie meets moms around the globe and finds that moms everywhere share the same hopes and expectations in growing happy, healthy families. Julie enjoys walking the path of motherhood with moms in all seasons and many cultures.

While Julie and Jeff led a small group of young couples starting to add children to their homes, conversations over coffees included common questions and themes about becoming parents and raising

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children. The moms-to-be inspired Julie to write devotions for their expectant hearts. Those couples each went on to fill their homes with unique families of their own. Julie believes God's Word is packed with practical wisdom and inspiration to help moms every day and to keep them through the night. She knows the challenge of mothering from the cradle to maturity calls for God's timeless truth.

Connect with Julie at juliesanders.org where she helps women find peace for their relationships and their days by sharing God's truth for the things of life, marriage, and parenting. As you grow your family, Julie will help you grow your expectant heart on the journey of motherhood.