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be expectant

GOD IS WORKING

*And my God will meet all your needs according to his
glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (PHILIPPIANS 4:19)*

“God’s gifts put man’s best dreams to shame.”¹

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

My girlfriends had warned me about the grocery store. And when my girlfriends spoke, I listened. These women were several years ahead of me in the ways of marriage, children, and well, just about everything. Their experience and wisdom always gave me pause and made me consider my steps. One day, my friend said, “If you end up having more than two children, you might not want to attempt to take your little ones with you to buy groceries all by yourself. With treats everywhere in sight and little hands reaching for them, it’s stressful to push a bursting shopping cart through the grocery store without losing your mind or possibly losing track of one of your kids.”

My hand found its way to my growing belly, and I swallowed

hard. The very thought of taking on such a task seemed more than a little overwhelming since I had yet to give birth to my first child. Though eventually I would have plenty of stressful trips to the store with my three sons, I also remember a time when, for me, it was a different experience altogether.



The grocery store was packed with moms and kids. Colorful packages of crackers and cookies promised bursts of flavor. Little toys hung on the endcaps, and children whined while moms pulled their little reaching arms back into the cart.

With my little Jordan in the basket seat and Jake and Luke hanging on to the sides of the cart, I worked up a sweat as I filled my shopping cart with different kinds of food.

After buckling my three little boys into their car seats, I crawled into the driver's seat of my car. It had been a tough few years for us financially. Nearly every dollar that came in went back out the door to pay down our medical debt.

I grabbed the steering wheel and rested my forehead on my hands. I was suddenly awash with gratitude. We had a week's worth of food in the trunk and even a couple of treats for the boys.

“Boys, before we head home, we're going to thank Jesus for all of this food. You know why? Because we have choices about what to eat! Many children won't get even one meal today. We have *several* kinds of cereals and soups. We have sandwiches and crackers. We even have some cookies and juice. Let's say thank You to Jesus.”

One by one, the boys folded their hands and bowed their heads. And one by one, we each thanked God for a cart full of food. We were blessed indeed.



In the four short years it took me to deliver three babies, we encountered more trials and stresses than I had ever imagined possible. Of course, I was completely naïve and bright-eyed going into marriage and parenting. I watched my friends and decided that my life would be like theirs. They had nice homes, money in the bank, and seemed able to parent out of instinct. I didn't know how or when all of those blessings would arrive for me, but nonetheless, I assumed they'd arrive.

God's blessings did find their way into my life but not in a way that I recognized at first. Our journey turned out to be a different one completely. While my friends took trips, decorated their homes, and bought nice clothes for their children, I spent months lying on my couch—on my left side—trying to prevent premature labor. Our babies struggled with respiratory issues, and I developed a disease that cost us a lot of money to diagnose and to treat.

For us, money was scarce and times were difficult, but one great blessing came in an unlikely package. I didn't want this gift, but God, in His infinite wisdom, blessed us with the gift of our *need*. We needed help.

It's no fun being the desperate one. All of our needs confronted my fear that I would inconvenience others right out of my life. If

I leaned on people too much, they might just go away. If I'm the one with "less-than," then I must *be* "less-than." Yet there I was, in need financially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That place of desperation felt like the worst place for me to be. But in fact, it was exactly where I *needed* to be.

I turned to God in prayer. I pondered verses like Philippians 4:19: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches . . ."

if I believed He was truly **BUSY AND ACTIVE** in my life, I had to **TRUST HIM** to help us in our time of need.

Really, Lord? Will You really reach into Your abundant supply and share some of it with my family? I looked out the window and watched the clouds pass overhead. If I believed He was truly busy and active in my life, I had to trust Him to help us in our time of need. And He did.

Somehow, somehow, our cereal seemed to last longer than it should. Somehow, somehow, I managed to find just the right thing at a garage sale. Out of the blue, a friend would offer me a bag of clothing that her kids had outgrown.

God unexpectedly met our needs in some of the most unlikely ways. At first I wasn't looking for God to show up. I was busy looking at what my friends had and constantly felt great angst that I was one of the have-nots. But when I decided to quit comparing myself with others and to start trusting that God had His own plan for me, my eyes opened to all of the ways God was providing for me, just as He promised.

One night I was covered in suds as I attempted to bathe my three little boys, all at the same time. They giggled and splashed while I

soaked up the wet floor with clean towels. My clothes were wet and my bangs were dripping. The doorbell rang, and I was in no shape to answer the door—and I surely wasn't about to leave my three kids in the tub by themselves.

One at a time, I lifted my little guys out of the tub, toweled them off, and helped them put on their pajamas. I actually forgot about the doorbell. Later that night my husband walked into the house carrying a bag of groceries. "You went grocery shopping tonight?" I asked as I greeted him at the top of the stairs. With a half smile, he said, "No, this bag was sitting on our doorstep. No note, just the food."

I brushed my wet bangs out of my eyes and thought back to the ringing doorbell. I imagined someone standing on our doorstep with food. I felt bad that I didn't even get to the door to thank the kind person who delivered such a timely gift. Even so, their sweet gift made me feel loved and cared for.

Though our struggles were real, God's love was more real still. And we were beginning to see Him everywhere in ways big and small.

The Lord was my provider and my refiner. He promised to supply all of my needs but He wanted me looking at *Him* (not at my friends' possessions). This is not to say that my friends never struggled or fought their own battles. They did. This is also not to say that I walked gracefully and embraced trust during our most trying times, because, to be quite frank, sometimes I kicked and screamed and threw my pillow across the bedroom in frustration and cried, "How long until You rescue us, Lord? How long until things don't feel so difficult?" I'd pray and cry and wait silently in God's presence, and every time His words would come back to me: *I will supply all*

of your needs, according to My riches, not yours.

I didn't always want to hear those words. I wanted my way. But during the times when I was actually willing to lay down my agenda and pick up God's promise to provide, I found a peace that was better than getting my way. I found something else too—the desire to thank Jesus for what I already had.

One morning I awoke to the task of making breakfast for my three little ones. I looked in the cupboard but already knew what I'd find. No cereal. No oatmeal. Just an almost-empty box of pancake mix sat on the shelf. Surely the neighbors would loan me some cereal if I asked them, but I couldn't bring myself to ask them. People had already helped us on numerous occasions. I was tired of being the friend who was always in need. Besides, we had pancake mix.

Something fluttered in my stomach at the thought of making this a special morning in spite of our desperate financial situation. With my three little boys seated in their booster chairs around the table, I eagerly set down one big plate before them, and four forks. Before our eyes sat one large pancake with a single flickering candle standing up in the middle.

Sitting on my knees on my chair so I could lean in especially close, I asked the boys to fold their hands and then I continued, "Guys, aren't we just so blessed today? The sun is shining. We have each other. Daddy's out there working hard for us. And God provided this big giant pancake for us to have for breakfast! Let's thank Him for taking such good care of us."

Enjoying our little celebration and without skipping a beat, the boys leaned in, bowed their heads, and in their own way, thanked

Jesus for our wonderful breakfast. They were giddy at the thought of an unexpected celebration. Afterwards we went outside and played together in the sandbox. That breakfast with my boys filled me with joy and taught me much about choosing a right perspective. As far as my boys were concerned, they had everything they needed. As far as I was concerned—at least at that moment—I did too.



It's a good thing to have all the props pulled out from under us occasionally. It gives us some sense of what is rock under our feet, and what is sand.² — Madeleine L'Engle



The disciples were exhausted. They had worked nonstop all day ministering to the needs of the people. *So* many families. *So* few disciples. Thousands of men, women, and children crowded together on the hillside, all with needs, all waiting to see Jesus. Antsy children ran amidst the throngs of people. Jesus and His disciples prayed for and ministered to the sick and the suffering *all day long*. Imagine a mother handing her desperately ill daughter to Jesus. Imagine Jesus handing back to the mother a perfectly healthy, wonderfully healed little girl. Picture it.

The day turned into evening. Fatigue set in. Possibly fifteen thousand people (the Bible tells us five thousand *besides* women and children) had gathered that day for a touch from Jesus. And

hours later, the multitudes remained. Imagine the various groups of men standing together and talking about the day. Imagine little children leaning into the arms of their moms and whining about their growling stomachs. Envision this scene.

As evening approached, the disciples came to [Jesus] and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” (Matthew 14:15)

Every mother, at some point or another, feels overwhelmed, outnumbered, and insufficient to meet the needs before her. In ourselves, we *aren’t* enough for the lofty task of motherhood. Jesus understands our predicaments. His disciples faced impossible situations

regularly. But it’s in our places of desperate need that Jesus makes Himself known.

it’s in our places
of **DESPERATE NEED**
that Jesus makes
Himself **KNOWN**.

When our strength is unequal to the task, we see the strength of God come to bear in our lives. And when what we hold in our hand falls short of the need before us, we can keep

perspective because we have a place to go with our need. We have a God who makes up where we lack. We have an engaged Father who lovingly provides for us. We have reason to be thankful.

Let’s take a look at Jesus’ response to what would be an impossible predicament for us; but first, let’s remember again the scenario. Possibly fifteen thousand people were under the care of thirteen men (the disciples and Jesus). They hadn’t eaten in hours, and it’s

likely that at least a few people and children were feeling a tad bit irritable. The disciples were ready for a break. They had, after all, been on duty all day. And they didn't, after all, have a budget to feed thousands of people. So you can understand why they asked Jesus to tell the people to go away and find some food for themselves.

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. (Matthew 14:16–19)

First, Jesus acknowledged what He had: five loaves and two fish. Not a bad meal for a small handful of people—but for thousands and thousands? Jesus took what He had, and He looked up to heaven. *He gave thanks.* And then He gave the food to the disciples who in turn fed the people.

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:20–21)

They all ate. They all were satisfied. And there were *leftovers*. What a miracle! How do we follow Jesus' example? We take our

little offerings, we look up to heaven, we thank God for His faithfulness, and then we go about our day. That's the stuff of miracles.



Cultivating a heart of gratitude in our children is impossible unless we ourselves are grateful. We can't impart something we do not possess. Always as moms, first and foremost, we have to keep a close watch on our own attitude, which is fueled by our perspective.

In good seasons and in difficult ones, we are under God's care, and He has *promised* to meet our needs. Therefore, we are called to give thanks.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV)

Sometimes giving thanks will feel like a “sacrifice of praise” because it will cost us something. This is not to say that we thank God *for* the painful things we endure, but rather, we thank Him amidst those difficult times. We thank Him *in* the pain, not *for* it. Just what does that look like on a practical level? Something like this:

Dear Father,

These are desperate times for us, and we are tempted to fear, but we know that You are faithful. You are faithful! Give us a bigger perspective during this trial. Remind us again that You know our need. We praise You ahead of time for the mighty ways You will

come through for us. Open our eyes so we can see You in the many surprising ways You plan on showing up along the way. Amen.

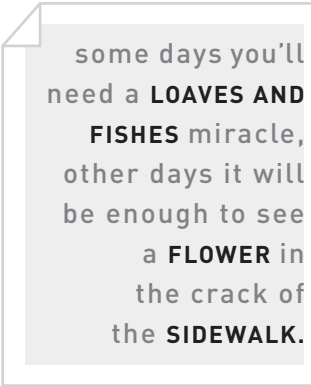
Dear friend, know that those kinds of prayers are a fragrant offering to your heavenly Father. It's a very big deal to God when His people pray in faith though they have lots of reasons to fear.

At times it will be *easier* to fret, complain, and to voice our fears in front of our children. Life gets stressful and countless things can shake our confidence and our footing. This is where our faith really counts. This is where our children have the potential of learning great things from us.

“Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander” (Hebrews 12:28, THE MESSAGE).

Some days you'll need a loaves and fishes miracle, other days it will be enough to see a flower in the crack of the sidewalk. Nothing is too difficult for Him. Not that He's bound to satisfy our every whim, but He has made a mighty promise to us: to supply all of our needs and to fulfill the desires of our heart—when we find our delight in Him.

Also, your children will pick up on your perspective. When you truly look for God's promises to come to bear in the day-to-day life as a wife, a mother, and a woman, *you* will find Him faithful. And



some days you'll need a **LOAVES AND FISHES** miracle, other days it will be enough to see a **FLOWER** in the crack of the **SIDEWALK**.

when you model a heart of gratitude—even during sparse seasons—your children will feel settled, secure, and cared for.

personal application:

- The minute your feet hit the floor in the morning, say out loud for your own ears to hear, “Every day I’m in God’s presence, and He will provide for me!”
- Spend time with God each day. Lots of time. As much time as you are able. Meditate on verses that talk about being thankful. Prayerfully thank God for His faithfulness. Believe it or not, this will build your faith!
- Start a thankfulness journal. Whenever you’re feeling blue, take some time and write down EVERY thing for which you’re thankful, e.g., clean, running water, a roof over your head, your husband, children, friends, church, and so on.

parental application:

- Each day, allow your children to hear you making “thankful” statements, e.g., “Look at the beautiful sky God painted for us today!” “Aren’t these sandwiches great?” “I’m so glad to be your mom.” “I’m thankful God made you so kind.”
- During trying times, find the blessing in them, e.g., When you come out of the doctor’s office, buckle your kids in and together pray something like, “God, we thank You that we have a doctor to go to when we’re sick. We pray for all of the sick children who can’t afford a doctor. Bless them too.”

be expectant

- At meal times, pick a child to pray for the meal and ask her to say what she's thankful for.
- Go around the table at dinner times and share highlights and lowlights about the day. Celebrate the highlights and help the children find perspective regarding the lowlights.

Dear Lord,

Help me to remember that You are always good, You're always working, and You're always thinking of me. Forgive me for my tendency to grumble, complain, and worry. Everywhere I look I see evidences of Your mercy and kindness. Thank You for my home, for running water, for clothes to wear, and for freedom. Remind me to practice gratitude every single day. Help me to voice my blessings far more than my burdens. You are always up to something. Help me to cultivate expectant faith in my home. May my children continually grow in the knowledge that You are good. Amen.