

Mom Heart Group Leader Guide

Starting, Leading, and Tending Your Mom Heart Group



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Mom Heart Group Leader Guide

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Mom Heart Ministry

is a motherhood initiative of Whole Heart Ministries, a Christian home and parenting ministry dedicated since 1994 to encouraging and equipping Christian parents to raise wholehearted Christian children.

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A Note from Sally Clarkson WELCOME TO MOM HEART!

Dear Sweet Mom,

Thank you for your interest in ministering to mothers. My own mom heart beats with a passion to encourage mothers and to help them rediscover God's heart for motherhood. This *Mom Heart Group Leader Guide*, along with your Bible and our other materials and resources, will help you start, lead, and tend a Mom Heart group of your own in your community or church.

Time is precious, especially for moms. If you give a few hours of your week to something, you want it to be purposeful and meaningful. The heart of our ministry is to encourage, equip, and enable you as a mother with a heart for ministry. We'll help you have an effective ministry that "redeems the time" for God.

All of my Mom Heart leaders are praying for you. We are working on ways to stay connected with you to support you in your ministry. You are not alone. You are part of a growing movement of small groups for moms after God's heart that I believe His Spirit is raising up "for such a time as this."

I hope you will join me, and so many other mothers already involved, as we step out in faith to build a community of Mom Heart moms all over the world. Help us restore moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood "that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born" (Psalm 78:6).

In His Heart,

Sally





Section 1: The Movement SEEING THE "BIG PICTURE" OF MOM HEART

As the sacred institution of marriage becomes weaker, American culture no longer considers child bearing, arguably the highest purpose of marriage, a sacred calling. Over the past few generations, our culture has lost its heart for biblical motherhood.

Feminism has produced generations of young women who, because they have not been taught or trained about the biblical design for motherhood, view motherhood simply as one of many goals and tasks that the modern woman must learn how to manage efficiently. It is not seen as a divine calling, a strategic part of God's eternal plan for transmitting faith through generations of families. Rather, it has become merely another option to consider, or just one of the many commitments in a modern woman's life. Many Christian mothers can even find themselves subtly conforming, willingly or unwillingly, to the prevailing culture. As the cultural understanding of what it means to be a mother evolves, it appears that traditional, biblical motherhood is increasingly marginalized and even minimalized.

The high calling of biblical motherhood is being swept away in a tidal wave of societal change, pushed aside by a secularized culture that no longer values God's view of family, home, and motherhood. The once dominant idea that a mother at home with her children is normative and desirable has been largely abandoned. Young women who are marrying and having children now often have grown up with little or no direct influence by strong models of Christian motherhood, or with a lack of personal training in what it means to have God's heart for motherhood. They have not rejected a biblical, traditional model of motherhood; they simply don't know what it is.

As a seasoned mother of four children, Sally Clarkson is driven by a passion for God's biblical design for the family. Her heart beats

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for Titus 2:3-5 motherhood and for 2 Timothy 2:2 discipleship as she comes alongside Christian moms to give voice and value to God's biblical principles and priorities of motherhood.

Though the wider culture in which we live often either dismisses as outdated or openly disdains biblical ideals for motherhood, Sally holds them up and calls moms back to them. Her vision for Mom Heart Ministry is to catalyze a movement of small groups of mothers around the world that will leave an indelible, eternal imprint on the next generation for Christ and His kingdom.

The time is right to renew and revive mothers' vision for biblical motherhood. Mothers are a strategic, open, waiting, and underserved mission field. But more than that, they are a spiritual force waiting to be unleashed on a coming generation of Christ followers being raised in their homes. Mom Heart Ministry wants to bring those ministry-minded moms together to make a difference.

Where Do You Fit in the Picture of Mom Heart?

Motherhood is more than just a biblical duty. It is a ministry of discipleship. Before he departed to be with the Father, Jesus gave us one great command: "Make disciples!" That is our mission in our time on this earth—to make followers of Jesus.

But that mission actually began in the beginning of creation, in the book of Genesis. Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, God created them and gave them the mandate to "fill the earth." Implicit in that mission was the understanding that those who filled the earth would then follow the Creator. In other words, making children was God's original plan for making disciples. But then there was the fall.

We live now in a broken world. God's design and plan for family has been distorted, but it has not changed. Our highest calling as Christian parents is to "make disciples" of our children—to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) so they will follow Christ and build his kingdom in their generation, and to "teach them diligently" (Deuteronomy 6:7) to love God with all their "heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27).

By nature and by nurture, mothers are inextricably part of that discipleship process. God's design for home and family places them at the center of influence in their children's lives. Mothers are, in many ways, the heart of parenting.

Our vision for Mom Heart Ministry is to restore moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood. We want to offer God's grace and truth from His Word that will set them free, not weigh them down. We want moms to live by faith, not by formula. We want to strengthen moms who are after God's heart—to help them disciple their children to become wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ, and to reach out to other mothers to impact the next generation for Him.

Picturing the Possibilities of a Mom Heart Group

Christian ministry is not a complicated idea. The meaning of the word in the New Testament is simply "service." Ministry is simply how we serve God, and serve others (John 12:26; Matthew 22:34-40). There are two broad types of ministry in the New Testament: church ministry and personal ministry.

Church ministry is how God's people come together as Christ's body to worship Him, teach and preach the Word of God, and equip one another for service. Personal ministry is how each spiritually-gifted individual serves God and His kingdom to build up the body of Christ and spread the gospel. Paul says we are all "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20), and that God is making His appeal to others through us, on behalf of Christ, that they be reconciled to God.

If the idea of "reconciliation" sounds like something that is above your spiritual pay grade, try substituting the phrase "coming home." Reconciliation is simply showing others the way to come home to where God always intended them to be. A Mom Heart group is one way you can be an ambassador for Christ by showing other moms how to come home to God's heart for motherhood.

Your Mom Heart group could be part of a church ministry, or it could be a personal ministry you offer in your community. You don't need any special gifting or training; you simply need the willingness

to start, lead, and tend a small group of moms intent on hearing from God. Your personal ministry to those moms will be the catalyst that facilitates God's ministry of reconciliation by the Spirit—restoring moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood.

The beauty of reconciliation ministry is that there is not just one way to offer it, but countless possibilities. Since we began Mom Heart Ministry in 2008, we have watched as the Spirit of God has worked through hundreds of groups in dozens of different ways. There is no "one size fits all" program for a Mom Heart group, but rather an "all sizes fit one" purpose. That one purpose is to reconcile moms to God's design for motherhood.

If you can picture yourself leading a small group of mothers, what you picture in all likelihood will look different from what others might picture in their minds. That's good. The Spirit of God creates a diversity of ministries, and gives us freedom to minister according to our own gifts and callings. Your own experiences, drives, convictions, needs, training, vision, and circumstances means that you will create a different kind of group from other mothers you know. For instance, the list below describes just a few of the many ways we have seen or contemplated Mom Heart groups being expressed:

- As a support group for friends who are mothers
- As an outreach to moms in a neighborhood
- As a group to prepare young women for motherhood
- As a support group during a mom's day out program
- As a group model for a MOPS® program
- As a groups ministry outreach to military mothers
- As a Titus 2 group to encourage younger mothers
- As an outreach and ministry to single mothers
- As a church ministry to equip mothers spiritually
- As an outreach to homeless moms
- As an outreach to at-risk teen or single moms

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- As a support group for homeschooling mothers
- As a support group for public schooling mothers
- As a group to support missionary mothers
- As a group to minister to pregnant unmarried girls
- As a group to pray for mothers around the world
- As a mothers of prodigals support group
- As a support group for mothers of teens
- As a mother-daughter motherhood study group
- As a support group for minority moms
- As a mothers of mothers support group

Our heart and vision is to trust the Spirit of God to create a movement of Mom Heart groups all around the world that is reaching and reconciling women to the Creator and to His design for mothers. Movement is the operative word of our vision—we have no desire to create, command, and control a Mom Heart organization, but rather to facilitate and shepherd a Mom Heart movement led by the Holy Spirit. Our role is to feed that movement to keep it growing.

A healthy movement requires two key elements: a mission, and a message. It needs a shared vision and a common set of core beliefs. That's why we ask every Mom Heart group leader to understand and agree with the Mom Heart Vision and Values Covenant (Section 8). We want to allow freedom for every Mom Heart group to be unique in its local expression, and yet also insure that it will be consistent with other Mom Heart groups around the world.

We trust the Holy Spirit to protect the vision and values of Mom Heart Ministry, and we trust Mom Heart group leaders to creatively express them through their own unique gifts, skills, ministry burdens, training, and circumstances. Our hope and prayer is that this leader guide will encourage, equip, and enable you, by faith, to start, lead, and tend a Mom Heart group in your part of God's world.

Mom Heart Keeps the Picture in Focus

We know that a movement cannot exist long without an idea, person, or cause providing a stabilizing focus. Followers need something or someone to follow. Mom Heart Ministry is a cause-driven movement—we are driven to restore biblical motherhood.

However, even great ideas can become volatile and unstable in the heat of debate, and good people can become uncertain and unpredictable in the throes of life. History is strewn with movements that have come and gone, as well movements that have stayed the course. We believe that a well-defined and supported biblical cause can become a stabilizing and unifying identity that creates a secure common ground for followers. Focus builds faith.

To keep the vision of this ministry in focus, we will connect with mothers who share our heart for motherhood. We will encourage and equip mothers online with training helps, events information, blog articles, selected books and resources, webinars, social media, and more. We want to be where the new generation of mothers will be.

As we move forward, we will offer new and helpful materials and resources by Sally and other leaders, including ebooks on a variety of topics, book and topical group study guides for free download, audio messages and podcasts, video messages, and other helpful print books and materials. We will encourage moms personally in a hotel retreat setting through our Mom Heart Conferences.

As a family-run ministry, we believe in the vision and the cause God has kept on our hearts and is expressing in Mom Heart Ministry. This *Group Leader Guide* will help you start, lead, and tend a Mom Heart group as we work to encourage, equip, and enable you as a mom. As long as God allows, we will keep the ministry vision in focus that a movement of Christian moms in our brief sojourn on this earth can make an impact on eternity through the lives of their children.

Section 2: The Members STARTING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

The hardest part of doing anything worth doing is the starting. Taking that first step takes a lot of effort and energy. In physics, that idea is expressed as inertia—the tendency of a physical object to resist acceleration. In other words, left on their own, things tend to stay as they are. Unless something moves them, they don't move.

It's easy to see how this principle from physical life illustrates a similar reality in our spiritual life. We can experience spiritual inertia. If we are resistant to change—if fear, lack of confidence, insecurity, or any number of conflicting feelings keep us from moving forward—we will resist taking a first step of faith. We need some outside force to move us so we'll get moving.

But God is inertia-adverse. If you are reasonably mature, ready and willing to lead a group, but resisting the idea, you need to know that God is ready to help you move. He is ready to encourage and strengthen you to take that step of faith.

To start something new, you must overcome spiritual inertia. Something has to move you to get moving. You've probably heard it many times before, but it is true: God can't steer a parked car. If you are hesitating to take that first step of faith, know first of all that God is ready to step into your life to help. He knows you, believes in you, and wants you to lead this group, so you can trust Him to help. He won't step in until you step out in faith, but when you decide to shift out of Park and put your life in Forward, He will begin to steer. His Spirit will begin to direct you forward.

And just a reminder: The size of your group does not matter to God. He is looking for faithfulness. Every mom in your group will be special to God, whether there are two, twenty, or two hundred. Whether they are there for fellowship, for encouragement, or to learn

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for the first time what God says about mothering, they will be there because *God* wants them to be there. And you will be there because He wants *you* to be there for them, leading those women in seeking after God's heart as mothers.

If you are ready to step out in faith to start a Mom Heart group, there are some first steps you can take to get moving: Pray, Purpose, Plan, Partner, and Promote. If you're overcoming spiritual inertia, consider these a one-step-at-a-time way forward. These few small steps will add up to one big step of faith.

PRAY: Ask God for Help

The first step in starting a group is to pray. You need to invite God into the process, seeking His direction and trusting Him to help you be a faithful servant to the moms He will bring to you. Here are just a few areas of prayer to consider:

- For wisdom and discernment A Mom Heart group is a spiritual ministry, so your first impulse should be to pray. Don't try to start God's work without your work of prayer. Ask God for wisdom and discernment as you prepare to take a step of faith with Him. Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit in your life and in the lives of those who join you. Before you start working on a "To Do" list, set aside a morning to read Scripture, meditate on it, and listen to what God is saying to you about ministering to moms.
- For God to provide members Ask God to show you who to invite to your group. Pray about mothers in your neighborhood and church who might need a group with other moms. Make a list of the women God puts on your heart, and pray for each of them regularly. If your vision and burden is for a larger group of women, or even for a ministry of multiple groups, pray for wisdom, resources, partners, facility, and whatever else will be needed. Always keep in mind, though, that you're praying for and about people, not just about a class or a program. Moms are the heartbeat of Mom Heart.

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- For mothers' hearts Remember that your group, whatever size it may be, is about discipleship and mutual accountability, not just a way to get away from home, or to have a regular coffee break and fellowship with friends. Pray that God works in each mom's heart, including yours, to be open to what the Holy Spirit would have you learn together as moms after God's heart. Ask God to help you respond graciously to those who are not yet interested, since they may just need time and may be future members.
- For a ministry partner Ask God to provide a kindred spirit to be your partner in this ministry to mothers, whether as a coleader, prayer partner, or supportive friend. Pray that God will prepare her to respond positively to your invitation to join you in this ministry. Ask her, and others, to pray for you as you seek God's direction for the group. If you envision a larger group, pray for a committed ministry team of mothers to join you in your vision.

PURPOSE: Clarify Your Vision

Before you make a plan for your group, you need to know your purpose. Making a plan without a purpose is like trying to follow a recipe without a description of what you're cooking. Your plan will be about "who, what, when, where, and how," but your purpose will be about "why." Having a purpose for your group may sound a bit lofty and subjective, but it is really quite simple. It is what you see with the eyes of your heart when you think about your group; it is what you picture in your mind that you want to see happen.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." A purpose or vision statement will not only help you be able to tell others about your group, but will also help you make decisions about the group—directing you which way to go, and protecting you from going the wrong way. A good purpose or vision statement is not about plan details (who, what, when, where, how), but about the why—why should, or does, this group exist?

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Writing a purpose statement can be a very positive and motivating exercise. Take some time to craft a statement that expresses what is really on your heart to do. Here are a few examples you can use to get you started on your own purpose or vision statement:

- The mission of this Mom Heart at Home group is to encourage, equip, and enable one another in the Lord as mothers after God's heart.
- We will meet as a Mom Heart group to give one another help and hope as mothers as we follow God's call to raise godly children for His glory.
- The Castle Pines Mom Heart Group exists to encourage and strengthen young mothers through studying the Word of God, discussion, accountability, and fellowship.
- The purpose of the Grace Church Mom Heart ministry is to restore moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood through mutual teaching, sharing, helping, and outreach.
- The One Heart Mom Heart Group is a safe shelter for single mothers to talk, share, learn, help, and grow as moms without partners in raising godly children.

PLAN: Create Your Ministry Map

Once your purpose statement is finalized, then you need to make a plan for how to accomplish that purpose. Moses was getting swamped by responsibilities of leading Israel until his father-in-law Jethro came up with a better plan. Nehemiah's well-crafted plan won Israel's release from Babylon to go back and rebuild Jerusalem. Plans accomplish purposes, but a good plan will be more than just a "Get It Done" list. It is a map that expresses clearly and concisely where you want to go and how you intend to get there. A thoughtful plan is an itinerary for the journey that you are about to begin, and a script to use for inviting others to join you. Plan to make a good plan.

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- Define the Membership Make a list of prospective group members. Will you focus on a certain life-stage of motherhood (new moms, moms of preschoolers, moms of teens, single moms, military moms, etc.), or will your group be open to all ages and stages of mothers? However you decide to define your membership will also affect the dynamic of the group.
- Determine the Size There is a certain amount of uncertainty when you first start a group. If you want it to be a home group, you will need to limit your membership size, which will limit response. A larger group will require larger facility space, more leadership, and additional resources. Know what your comfort level is for the size of your group.
- Decide the Details Determine what a prospective member will need to know, such as day, meeting time, length of the meeting, frequency of meetings, location, size of group, and the material you plan to study. Anticipate questions and be ready to describe your group: "We'll meet each week for Bible study and fellowship at my house from ten o'clock until noon. We want to encourage each other as moms."
- Consider Distractions Anticipate issues and consider how to prevent unnecessary distractions. Will your group be open, or by invitation only? Will it be a continuing group, or new after each book or semester? Can prospective new members join in the middle of a study? Will you offer childcare and, if you do, will there be a cost?
- Create a Calendar Create a projected calendar of meetings for the entire book or Bible study, with chapter to read and discuss, materials and supplies needed, possible volunteers needed, and expectations of the group such as reading a chapter or doing a study before the group. A calendar will help to engender confidence in you as a leader, and give the group as a whole a sense of direction and unity.

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PARTNER: Enlist an Ally

Paul thanked the Philippian Christians for their partnership in the gospel with him, expressing his love for them and his expectation of their spiritual fruitfulness (Philippians 1:3-11). Their partnership with him in the ministry for Christ brought Paul great joy. His calling to take the gospel to the Gentiles required him to travel thousands of miles, and on most of his journeys Paul took along companions who would learn from him, but who also would encourage him. Paul knew he needed allies for his journey of ministry, and he valued the fellowship and partnership of other believers in that work.

Don't try to lead a group alone—you need a partner! The best time to approach another mom is when you are starting the group. Look for a mom who shares your heart for mothers, and who would be willing to assist you in leading the group. Be like Paul, though, and be open to engaging a mom who could be open to your influence. Consider this an opportunity to identify an ally who might also become an apprentice—someone you can train and encourage to start and lead their own group in the future.

Look for an ally you can pray with, be encouraged by, ask for wisdom and insight when it is needed, depend upon, and just enjoy. Ask God to lead you to the right person. Even if you plan to lead a larger group of moms with a leadership team, have an ally or two who will be your inner circle of support and encouragement.

Remember, you're not just looking for a volunteer worker, but for a valued ally. Look for these qualities in a good ministry partner:

- Like-minded You share common vision and values.
- **Faithful** She will be true to the purpose of the group.
- Available She is ready and eager to serve other moms.
- **Teachable** She is humble, willing to learn and follow.
- Reliable You can depend on her to do what she says.

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PROMOTE: Spread the Word

Promotion is different from persuasion. Promotion is letting moms know about your group, and how they can find out more, so they can determine if they want to be involved. Persuasion is trying to convince moms why they should join your group. Persuasion is not a bad thing, unless it makes the focus of someone's decision what *you* want them to do instead of what *God* wants them do.

God knows what He's doing to build your group, and that gives you freedom simply to be a good promoter who trusts the Holy Spirit to do the persuading. Even Paul, the greatest apostle, said of himself, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:3-5). Similarly, let someone decide to come to your group because of the "power of God," not just because of your "persuasive words of wisdom."

George Mueller, the nineteenth century British minister, is known for not asking donors for money for his ministry to orphans. Instead, he would pray and wait, trusting God to provide. The same principle can be true of your group. Don't get anxious about getting women to join. Rather, tell them what you're doing, and why, and then trust God to bring the moms who need to be there.

Below are some suggestions to help you get started on promoting your group to moms. You don't have to do them all!

 Word of Mouth — Begin telling people you know. These are likely existing friends you have through church, a group, your neighborhood, or your children's sports and community activities. Tell your friends to tell their friends! Create an attractive email to send out to your friends (insert a small photo of yourself to make it more personal). Share regularly about your developing group on Facebook, Twitter, and any other social media you use.

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- Printed Materials Create a simple half-page handout or full-page flyer about your group. If needed, ask a friend who enjoys graphic arts on the computer to design it for you. Promotional materials printed in color are more likely to be read. If you want to reach out, identify possible places to distribute your materials, such as in the church bulletin or on the visitor's table, a community center, a support group or co-op, or a Christian bookstore. You never know which location will be the one that reaches a ready mom.
- Leaders and Gatekeepers Identify ministry and community leaders who are in touch with women who might benefit from your group, and let those leaders know what you're doing—your pastor, your church women's ministry leader, family and children's pastors, a homeschooling support group leader, leaders in other churches. You don't need to persuade them about your group; just let them know what you're doing and ask them to let others know.
- Digital Connections To stay connected with your group members, plan to use digital resources and social media. Start by creating an email list to communicate with interested moms (be sure to have their permission to send them an email). Then create a Facebook group where you can post regular news and updates, and possibly a Twitter account to post short messages. If you are so inclined, you can create a free blog (Wordpress.com or Blogger.com) where you can describe your group and share your thoughts and insights. If there is a Facebook Mom Heart page for your city, be sure to announce your group there.

HINTS: The Members

Owning Your Leadership

- ⇒ **Testimony**: Be prepared in your heart and mind to share your vision for your Mom Heart group with others outside your group who ask about it. It is not prideful for you to be positive, hopeful, and optimistic about your group.
- ⇒ First Meeting: When you meet for the first time, share your journey of starting and leading the group—how God put it on your heart, why you felt you needed a group, how God opened doors, what you envision the group becoming. Your story will help the others in your group feel they are part of something God is doing.
- ⇒ **Questions:** Being the leader of the group does not mean that you need to have an answer for every question. It simply means you will be willing to help find an answer, or see that someone else in the group does.
- ⇒ False Humility: A new leader can feel uncomfortable as the "out front" person. They might feel the need to be quiet and constrained out of a misplaced fear of being perceived as prideful. However, don't let a false humility deprive the others in your group of the leadership they will be looking for. You can be confident in Christ.
- ⇒ Discussion Guide: One of the challenging by key tasks of a group leader is getting back to and staying on topic if group discussion veers into critical comments or disagreements about churches or denominations, political issues, personal preferences (movies, music, and such), educational choices, parenting styles, or other conflicting opinions. Take the lead to end that discussion and get back on the topic.

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Section 3: The Meeting SERVING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

Throughout the Bible, we see examples of God's people gathering together to serve, love, encourage, pray, worship, and learn with one another. In the early chapters of the book of Acts, the church is described as gathering regularly for the purpose of engaging in very specific activities together, both in large gatherings and in small home gatherings. Those meetings were not random and unplanned, but purposeful and thoughtfully prepared.

Meetings are a fact of Christian life. Some will be characterized by "letting the Spirit lead," which is appropriate for some meetings. Others, though, will be characterized by someone "leading by the Spirit." Those times are not aimless gatherings, and can be effective when directed by someone with an aim in mind.

Your aim should be to create a meaningful meeting for all the moms who are involved in your group. But it will be about more than only pursuing your purpose or accomplishing your plans. You will also need to create a meeting environment that is safe, comfortable, enjoyable, under control, and free of unnecessary distractions. That kind of meeting atmosphere will not happen by accident. It requires thoughtful planning.

As the group leader, you are like the director of a symphony—orchestrating many different elements to create refreshing and beautiful spiritual music that is melodic and harmonious. It may take some time to get everyone together on the same notes and on the same beat, but when it happens it will be delightful and powerful.

The following principles of group leadership are not rules or laws, but wisdom principles drawn from Scripture and life. Following them will help insure that your group makes beautiful music together.

MOTES

Be Prepared: Honor Your Group with Readiness

Serving any size of group well includes preparing well. We all know the awkwardness of being in a meeting when the leader is not prepared—it can be uncomfortable, unresponsive, and unproductive. We also know what it's like when a group leader is well-prepared—it inspires confidence that invites responsiveness and participation. Of course, we also know the discomfort of sitting under a controlling and overbearing leader, but that model has absolutely no place in a Mom Heart group. A Mom Heart group leader should be ready, prepared, confident, and gracious.

As a leader, your readiness for a group meeting will make you more relaxed, and that will make your group members more relaxed, receptive, and responsive. There are few things more frustrating for a small group leader than a passive and unresponsive group. The better prepared you are the better you will be able to encourage the kind of group interaction and discussion that will make your group a delight to all who are there. Your preparedness actually gives the Holy Spirit more room to work in and through your moms' hearts. Here are a few helpful tips on getting ready:

- Pray for Your Group Spend time praying for the moms in your group throughout the week. They will sense your concern for their needs when you meet, and that will make them more receptive to your leadership and willing to participate in group discussions. Pray also for your own spirit of service, your ministry of leadership, the dynamics and relationships of the group, and for the details surrounding the group meeting. Pray for God's grace to saturate all that you do. Prayer is spiritual preparation for leading your group with spiritual power.
- Prepare for Your Lesson Start preparing your lesson well in advance. If you wait until the last minute, your authority as a leader will last about a minute. Give yourself plenty of time during the week to read the group materials or book, do the Bible study or discussion questions, and prepare your HEART

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lesson plan (see Section 5: The Model—Leading Your Mom Heart Group). The more time you give yourself to review and become familiar with the material, the more time you give God to get the lesson from your head into your heart. When it is only in your head, you can teach with personal authority; when it is also in your heart, you will lead and teach with spiritual authority and confidence.

Plan for Your Meeting — The old adage is still true: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. The devil is in the details of even the smallest small group, but just a little advance planning will help deter devilish distractions. Any small area of detail fail handouts, refreshments, babysitter—can leave you frustrated and distracted when you need to be focused. Use the Mom Heart Group Planning Sheet to make sure the devilish details are covered—meeting area is organized, materials are printed and available, volunteer helpers know their responsibilities, refreshments are purchased and ready ahead of time, child care workers are scheduled, reminder emails about the meeting are sent, and whatever else needed is done. If you will be meeting somewhere other than in your own home, be sure to let the host or facility manager know that you will plan to arrive thirty minutes before the meeting begins (earlier if you are responsible for any setup).

Be Hospitable: Serve Your Group with Enthusiasm

As a mother with time in the trenches, you have by now learned one important truth by experience: Motherhood is delightful, but it can also be demanding and daunting. The daily piling on of duties, responsibilities, crises, conflicts, and needs can leave even the most capable mom feeling tired, alone, discouraged, and overwhelmed. When moms come to your group meeting, the demands of motherhood can sometimes weigh heavily on them. Carrying that weight can drain the delights of motherhood from their spirits, and that can affect the spirit of your group.

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When you see a mom with that weight walking in your door, that is not something you need to correct. After all, she is coming to the Mom Heart group to have others who will share in that burden. It should not be corrected, but it can be deflected. You have the power to create a space for moms in your group to feel loved, encouraged, and refreshed. How? Simply by creating an atmosphere and environment of hospitality in your home.

According to Dictionary.com, hospitality is "the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way." It is more than just welcoming someone into your home; it is creating a welcoming home. The *atmosphere* of hospitality is the spiritual air that your guests will breathe in—the tones of joy, enthusiasm, and anticipation; the spirit of grace, gentleness, and love; the sense of God's life and truth; the priority on people and relationship. The *environment* of hospitality is the surroundings that your guests will experience—the orderliness and ambiance of a room that makes it inviting, comfortable, and attractive; thoughtful décor that adds life, beauty, color, and texture; inviting, tasteful refreshments that are creative, healthy, and presented nicely; selected music, art, and books that add fullness and meaning.

You may be thinking, "I understand about the atmosphere of hospitality, and can do that. But I don't know about the environment part. We don't have nice things, and I'm not a good decorator." But consider this: If atmosphere is the verbal expression of welcome, then environment is the nonverbal. A welcoming home environment says loudly and clearly to your guests that they are important enough to you that you have thoughtfully prepared a place of welcome for them. It does not take much to create a welcoming and hospitable environment that will "speak" to your guest. And when you do, it will also strengthen and enhance the personal atmosphere you create. This is true even if you are meeting in a neutral, non-home facility—whatever you do to improve the environment will also improve the atmosphere. It just takes a little extra time and effort. That's why Paul exhorts Christians, "Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13 NIV).

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Be Encouraging: Influence Your Group with Godliness

The Apostle Paul encouraged believers with the truth that had been revealed to him by God (2 Corinthians 4:1-6), but he also encouraged them with his own example of how that truth is lived out through a godly life (2 Corinthians 4:7-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul practiced and preached what he believed. Several times in Scripture, Paul holds up his own life to others as an example to follow and emulate. As a follower of Christ and a leader, your goal should be no different—that your life would be an example to others. As the leader of your group, you have the opportunity to encourage your moms to believe God and to be faithful.

The biblical idea of encouragement is typically represented by the Greek verb *parakaleo*. It is a compound of two Greek words—*para*, alongside; and *kaleo*, to call. Literally it means to "call alongside," but can be translated as encourage, exhort, or comfort. The encourager is one who comes alongside another to help as they walk with Christ. Being that kind of encourager is a key part of your role as a Mom Heart group leader—to come alongside each mom in your group and encourage them in their life with Christ. One of the greatest gifts you will give to your group is godly, biblical encouragement.

You may not feel qualified or gifted enough to think that you could be a godly encourager like Paul, but remember that you have the same Holy Spirit that Paul did. If God calls you to a ministry, He will equip and empower you by His Spirit to do it (Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Peter 1:2-11). You can expect spiritual battles tempting you to feel discouraged, inadequate, or afraid, but the Spirit of God will come alongside you to encourage you, to help you find courage through Him. Paul's pastoral protégé, Timothy, apparently was timid and lacked courage. In his very last letter, Paul encouraged Timothy with these words: "God did not give you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). The same Spirit is at work in your life. Being a godly encourager is not about what you can do, but what the Spirit can do through you.

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Be Protective: Cover Your Group with Security

Have you ever had a confidence broken? A secret revealed by a friend? A fear or failure shared privately exposed publicly? A past deed you have tried to forget revived? Your reputation stained by malicious gossip? Your behavior or values demeaned by a critic? If you have, then you know what it feels like to have your private life violated. The embarrassment, anger, or fear passes, but the inevitable end result is distrust, withdrawal, and self-protection. When safety leaves, so does the person. When a group is not safe, it will not thrive, and may not survive.

One of your highest priorities as a Mom Heart group leader is to assure every mom that she is in a safe and secure group. She needs to have confidence that anything she shares with the group, other than illegal or harmful behavior, will be held in strict confidence by the others. Foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable, respected, and honored. As a leader, you will create the tone that will make them feel safe to share and learn together.

We reject legalism in any form. However, we do uphold three guiding "laws" that we expect each Mom Heart group to accept and enforce. These are not unbiblical laws of belief or behavior that will separate and judge; rather, they are biblical laws of relationship that will protect and guide. The purpose of each "shalt not" below is to help you cultivate and maintain the safety and security of your group:

• Thou Shalt Not Betray — Betrayal of any kind—of a trust, confidence, secret, fear, or past sin—creates an atmosphere of distrust in a group. Establish a clear standard of group loyalty and confidentiality early, remind members of it regularly, and intervene immediately if you hear anything that could threaten it. It is up to you to protect the covenant of mutual trust that grows out of sharing personal needs and struggles. Betrayal wounds hearts, and will severely, if not irreparably, damage your group. You are protecting not only the moms' hearts in your group, but also the integrity of your Mom Heart group.

- Thou Shalt Not Gossip Scripture declares that gossip is a serious sin. Paul includes gossip in his lists of sins that include wickedness, greed, murder, envy, slander, and many more (Romans 1:28-32; 2 Corinthians 12:20). In Titus 2:3-5 he says, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips." Gossip most often occurs in the form of unguarded conversation about people and affairs outside of the group. Enforce a no-gossip policy (and beware the gossip-driven prayer request!). Gossip is a destructive poison that can infect the spirit of your group and kill it. Constrain it, and be ready to confront it if necessary.
- Thou Shalt Not Judge A judgmental attitude in some large ministries can be grounds for dismissal. A staff member with a consistently critical spirit is a negative and corrosive influence on others, and especially on group unity and cohesiveness. The same is true for a Mom Heart small group or ministry. You've probably encountered someone with a judgmental attitude or spirit—new ideas are negated or neutralized, weaknesses and flaws are pointed out in leaders, motives and attitudes are judged, events and activities are criticized, and on it goes. As the group leader, be alert to a judgmental or critical spirit, and don't hesitate to lovingly confront it if necessary.

Be Loving: Infuse Your Group with Grace

The New Testament is full of grace. We pray that every Mom Heart group also will be full of grace. The Greek word *charis*, which means a "gracious benefit bestowed," appears about 100 times in the New Testament. You probably know the many familiar passages about God's grace *toward* us in salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10), but God's grace is also expressed *through* us in our relationships with one another. It is the "unmerited favor" of God, but its most basic meaning is "that which causes delight." Grace characterizes a lifestyle that offers others the same favor and delight we have found in God, in contrast to the burden that rules and laws place on the spirit.

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As a group leader, you "infuse your group with grace" when your discussions and teaching bring spiritual delight to your moms—spirits are lifted, burdens are eased, and faith is affirmed. Rather than guilt, condemnation, or shame, moms will find the grace that Jesus offers through His Spirit—love, hope, mercy, forgiveness, freedom, help, encouragement, edification, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and joy in the Lord.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul made clear that those who taught a Christianity of keeping laws and rules were living by the flesh (sin), not by the Spirit. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free [from slavery to law]" (5:1), and that freedom is found only in living by the Spirit—by the law of love that He has written on our hearts, not by the old Law of external rules and regulations. Grace sets us free to set others free to live in the Spirit by the law of love that Christ taught (John 15:12-17). Grace brings freedom.

Most Christians rightly teach that we are no longer to live by the demands of the Jewish Law, but too many then turn around and preach that we need to live by Christian laws—rules that will, they claim, make us acceptable to God. "Real" Christians need to believe or behave according to their way in order to be acceptable to God, and to them. Rather than creating true unity in the Spirit, their "Christian law" only creates barriers to fellowship through disunity, guilt, and condemnation. But that is not the teaching of Christ or the apostles. And it should never be the teaching of a Mom Heart group.

Infusing your group with grace does not mean that sin is glossed over or overlooked. John said, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Truth is always just as much a part of being Christ to others as is grace, and they are found in perfect balance in Christ. As those called to be like Christ, we are to offer truth balanced with grace. If you study God's truth in your group in an atmosphere of grace, you will bring delight to your moms' hearts.

HINTS: The Meeting

Getting Together Purposefully

- ⇒ Assistance: Ask your ministry partner to come thirty minutes before your group starts to help with last-minute preparations, and to pray together. Encouragement and a peaceful spirit will help you lead your group confidently.
- ⇒ **Safety:** Don't try to force openness and honesty from a group member. Prying or cajoling a reluctant mom to open up, even if done good naturedly, can feel to her like an invasion of her private life, and make the group feel unsafe to her.
- ⇒ Connection: Times have changed, and now the best way to stay in touch with a group of women is through an online connection such as Facebook. Start a Facebook group and invite women to join. You can create community, make announcements, keep a calendar, share prayer requests, post good links, and more. If you choose to make your Facebook group open, other women who may not be able to attend can still benefit from the community.
- ⇒ First Meeting: Spend your first meeting just getting to know one another. Create an inviting atmosphere and provide a delicious dessert and beverages. Ask each mom ahead of time to prepare a 2-3 minute talk about their history, family, and hopes. We call it a "mintro" (minute intro). Be ready with some creative discussion questions: What are five adjectives that describe you? What are the most and least enjoyable things about your life? If you had unlimited funds, where would you want to live and raise your children? What is a "hidden talent" that most people don't know about you?
- ⇒ Candles and Music: Candles can add a physical and spiritual warmth to a home, reminding of Christ's light and life. Music is emotional light that can create a tone to your home—inspirational, celebrational, reflective, casual, fun, and more.

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Section 4: The Ministry NURTURING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

ne of the words for nurture in the New Testament is the Greek term *ektrepho*, which literally means "to feed from." Paul said husbands were to *ektrepho* their wives (Ephesians 5:29, "nourish"), and fathers their children (6:4, "bring them up"). Biblical nurture is the act of feeding another person from the life of God that is already in your own life. That is one of the privileges you have as a Mom Heart group leader—to nurture the life of Christ in other moms out of your own life with Him. You can facilitate a group atmosphere that will encourage that kind of nurture. Creating that kind of life-giving dynamic in your group will come mostly from your own personal ministry of nurture with each individual woman.

A Mom Heart group provides a unique way to have a personal ministry. Perhaps you think that sounds like something you don't feel equipped to do—to personally engage another mom and minister to her. But nurturing someone else is not difficult or scary, requires no special training, and can make a difference in that person's life. We believe that God has enabled every believer, not just the professional clergy, to have a personal ministry. As a group leader, you exercise a personal ministry of influence and encouragement in a mom's life simply by spiritually nurturing her.

Many moms will never be nurtured spiritually. Don't let that be the experience of the moms God brings to your group. The personal ministry of spiritual nurture should be as natural and nonthreatening as meeting for coffee. It's not about following a formula, but simply about purposeful and meaningful fellowship in Christ. To help you create nurturing moments with your moms, we've created an acrostic out of MOM to suggest three things you can do.

M — Meet Purposefully with Each Mother

Make it a goal to meet with each mom in your Mom Heart group at least one time during a season of study, more if possible. Purpose in your heart ahead of time to make your meeting a meaningful time of biblical fellowship, or *koinonia*. In the New Testament, that word signifies a "communion of intimate participation" between followers of Jesus (Acts 2:42-47). Paul thanks God and prays for the Philippian church that brings him joy because of their "participation [*koinonia*] in the gospel" with him. He affirms his affection for them, confirms his confidence in God's work in their lives, and shares his expectation of their continued growth and obedience (Philippians 1:3-11). Following the pattern in Paul's words—affirmation, confirmation, expectation—suggests a simple, three-part model for how to make every meeting with your moms a time of purposeful fellowship.

We all love getting together socially with a special friend for no other reason than just to relax. We all need a respite now and then for refreshment and enjoyment. However, if you want a time together to be about true biblical fellowship, you will need to be intentional and purposeful about it. It may start out as a casual time of getting to know one another, or even as a serious time to guide and counsel on topics or issues too sensitive for the larger group setting. However, regardless of whatever reason brings you together, you can always turn any meeting into a time of spiritual nurturing.

Only one thing will prevent this kind of nurturing ministry from happening—failure to initiate. If you don't initiate, then you won't participate. Implicit in the concept of *koinonia* fellowship is reaching out to those with whom you share the life of God. In an increasingly fragmented and impersonal world, the art of initiating purposefully into another person's life is being lost in the flood of digital, social, and spiritual substitutes. As a Mom Heart leader, you can have a true spiritual impact on the moms in your group, but only if you choose to initiate and meet with them. Here are some tips for meeting:

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- Initiate and work out a time with the mom that will be convenient for both of you. Get each mom on your calendar early in the season of your group. Be sure to ask about child care.
- Select a familiar meeting place such as your home, a favorite coffee spot, or a park. Wherever you choose, be sure it allows for private, intimate, and uninterrupted conversation.
- Have a personal ACE message (Affirmation, Confirmation, Expectation) ready in your mind, or even on a note in your Bible. Just taking some time to thoughtfully prepare those statements will create a sense of purpose and meaning in your mind for the meeting.
- Call or send a personal email reminder the day before your meeting expressing how much you look forward to the time.
 Share a meaningful Scripture or quote.
- Offer to pick up the mom and drive to the meeting location.
 The drive can provide time for small talk so you can move on to more important conversation when you meet.

O — Offer Thoughtfully Biblical Encouragement

When Jewish Christians in the early church were forced to leave Jerusalem because of the persecution, they were scattered to distant locations where they no longer had familiar people and places to count on for spiritual security. They were far from home and on their own. So listen to what the writer of Hebrews told them: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV). We, too, are far from home and on our own. Your role as a Mom Heart leader is to offer the love and encouragement that your moms need as they are looking for spiritual security in their journey through life as a mother. You can do that best by encouraging them from God's Word.

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The writer of Hebrews also said that "the word of God is living and active" (4:12). Paul, in his last written words, said that every bit of Scripture is "God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man [or mom] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV). The psalmist affirmed to God, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:102). Jesus ended His sermon on the mount with the reminder that "everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them" will be like the wise man who "built his house on the rock" rather than on shifting sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Here's the basic truth: The Bible, God's Word, is living and active, working within us to guide us, help us mature, equip us for kingdom work, and enable us to weather the storms of life.

When you meet with each of your moms, plan to make God's Word part of your conversation. There may be a "by the Spirit" Bible verse that will come up as you talk, but you should also be prepared ahead of time "by the Spirit" with thoughtful verses you've selected. That just means you plan ahead to bring the spiritual nurture and nourishment that you know will encourage your moms. Here are a few practical ways you can feed and encourage with God's Word when you meet:

- Pray about what encouragement you think each mom might need and have some selected Scriptures in mind when you meet. Write them down, or mark the pages in your Bible.
- Ask thoughtful questions and listen carefully before you offer Scripture for encouragement or advice. Share your insights the same way you'd like someone to share Scripture with you.
- Wait for a natural time to share a Scripture. Be careful not to emotionally ambush with God's Word, or force it unnaturally into a narrow opening.
- Rather than applying a Scripture to your friend, talk about how it has helped you personally. Sharing truth as personal testimony can be more effective than admonition.

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- If you have personal counsel or advice to offer, anchor it in biblical truth or wisdom.
- After your meeting, send a note of encouragement to that mom with selected scriptures that you discussed.

M — Make Meaningful Prayer a Priority

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Paul was not saying that prayer is the *only* thing you should do; rather, he was saying that prayer should be a part of *everything* you do. Worship, intercession, thanksgiving, submission—these all are aspects of a healthy prayer life. Prayer is an ongoing conversation with God. When you meet with a mom and encourage her from God's Word, the natural and normal response to hearing from God should be to talk to God.

Remember that you are offering spiritual nurture to the mom you are meeting with, feeding her from the life of Christ in your own heart. In case you missed it, this MOM acrostic has spelled out three channels of what could be called "means of grace." You are nurturing a mom by opening windows of God's grace into her heart through fellowship (God speaking to and through you), God's Word (God speaking to you), and prayer (you speaking to God). When those windows are opened, God's grace, the gift of his favor and blessing, can flow into an open heart. By doing those three very simple things, you are bringing life-giving grace into that mom's mind and heart.

All three of the above ways to nurture are important, but prayer is the key to this triad of nurturing grace—it is what turns your focus and attention from yourself onto the living God. When you pray, you are acknowledging by faith that "he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Here are some suggestions for how to make prayer a natural and meaningful part of your MOM time.

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- Don't force prayer into your time together, but be sensitive to appropriate times to stop and pray about an issue, or to close your time together with a short prayer. If a natural time to pray doesn't happen, simply ask, "How can I be praying for you," and assure her you'll pray later.
- Be aware of your environment. If you're in a small coffee shop with others in close proximity, pray when you get to your car.
 Even mature believers can feel self-conscious praying in public where others can watch and listen.
- Be aware of the mom for whom you are praying. If you sense or discern that there is any discomfort with praying in public, then don't. She is the priority, not the need to make prayer happen. Ask how you can pray for her later.
- Be discerning about what kind of prayer will be appropriate, whether it should be short or can be longer, and how personal you should be in your prayer. If a matter seems sensitive, just ask, "Do you mind if I pray about that?"
- If you aren't able to pray together in person, call the mom and pray on the phone with her. If you're both comfortable with tech and connectivity, you can pray together on a video call by Skype or FaceTime.
- Pray regularly for each of the moms in your group in your own personal prayer times. Send them a text or email to let them know that you've prayed for them.
- Keep a written or digital record of special prayer requests by each mom, or specific needs for which you have prayed. Ask each mom privately how God has responded. This record of prayers should be private, secured, and not shared publicly. Unless you have her permission, it should remain only between you and the other mom.

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HINTS: The Ministry

Making Spiritual Friendships

- ⇒ Gifts: A thoughtful gift can be a powerful way to express love and friendship. It can be as simple as some flowers, or something very personalized or meaningful. A special teacup can create a bond; a framed calligraphy Bible verse can encourage in a hard time; a figurine can express symbolic meaning or commemorate an event. Be creative.
- ⇒ **Books**: A book specifically chosen and given at the right time can be both a meaningful and a helpful gift. Inscribe it with a personal note and a relevant scripture.
- ⇒ Photos: Photographs are visually captured memories. A fun or memorable photo turned into a print and specially framed can become a treasured gift. Use a no-bleed fine point Sharpie to record the place and date on the back.
- ⇒ **Music:** Music is personal. When you give a mom a music CD that reflects her personal musical tastes, it is a way of affirming who she is, and appreciating what she likes.
- ⇒ Potlucks: "Go into all the world and have potlucks." There was always a bit of truth in that humorous commentary on small church mission. Meals are important in Scripture, and important in our lives. Eating together is a biblically-affirmed fellowship experience. Thank God it is! Plan potlucks, picnics, repasts, progressive dinners, and other food-centered events into your group calendar.
- ⇒ Holidays: Reserve a spot on your group calendar early in the season for holiday get-togethers. Holiday events are great times to get the husbands involved. Have a dessert night and carol-sing at Christmas; plan a Valentine Day potluck with a rom-com movie; have a spring fling in the park with a picnic and family fun day.

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Section 5: The Model LEADING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

You probably have heard it taught that the church is both a living organism and a functional organization—the dynamic and gifted body of Christ led by the Holy Spirit, as well as the orderly and structured gathering of God's people led by its leaders. Both qualities are important, and both are necessary.

In the early chapters of the book of Acts, the church is alive with the Holy Spirit, growing organically with new believers, and rapidly increasing wherever the Spirit touches lives. However, as the church grows it also is being organized to support and direct all the new souls being added to its numbers. In Acts 2:42, the dynamic new church is already settling into a purposeful structure of "devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." They are meeting both in large groups in the temple courts for teaching, and in small groups in houses for fellowship and worship (Acts 2:43-47).

Mom Heart groups are modeled after the small groups seen in the early church in Acts. Our primary mission is to encourage, equip, and enable moms to start, lead, and tend small groups of mothers. As part of the equipping mission, we have created an uncomplicated, effective teaching model that you can use for leading your small group meeting time. It is designed both to cultivate the organic nature of your group meeting, and to regulate its organizational structure. The HEART small group lesson model provides both flexibility and orderliness in a simple, memorable meeting template.

There are, of course, countless ways to lead a small group, and many teachers have their own favorite lesson outlines to follow. The most popular teaching models tend to share similar priorities, but simply express them in different creative ways. For example, for

many years a common small group Bible study and discussion model has been the "Hook, Book, Look, Took" approach popularized by Dr. Larry Richards—gain attention, talk about the passage, apply it personally, express it in life. That pattern has been imitated by many other teachers.

For Mom Heart groups, we have created our own model using the acrostic HEART. It follows roughly the same pattern as other models, except that it uses the priorities of inductive Bible study as guides for study—invitation, observation, interpretation, application, and supplication. If you're not familiar with the terms, "deductive" Bible study starts with a topic and studies Scripture to explain it; "inductive" Bible study starts with a passage and studies the Scripture to learn what it has to say. The HEART outline is modeled after an inductive study because we want each Mom Heart group to start with the Word to discover what God has to say through it. It is a model that begins with "hear" because it is about listening for God's voice. The purpose of the HEART model is to insure that your group does not miss the "heart" of their time studying the Word together.

The HEART model is described in more detail in the following pages. We believe it is a unique design that can help you create a rich and meaningful small group experience. You're free to use other models in creating your own lesson plan, but we encourage all of our Mom Heart group leaders to use the HEART model. Below are the five priorities of a HEART-shaped Mom Heart group meeting. The remainder of this chapter explains in detail how to use the model.

- **H** Hear the Spirit (Invitation)
- E Engage the Word (Observation)
- A Affirm the Truth (Interpretation)
- R Respond to God (Application)
- T Take It to Heart (Supplication)

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H — HEAR THE SPIRIT

Purpose: To introduce the topic of the day's lesson with a nonthreatening discussion that generates interest, involvement, and interaction among group members, and sets the spirit for the lesson.

Activity: Invitation — What is the Bible talking about?

Time: 10-15 minutes

Planning: Invitation gets everyone on the same page. Create several discussion questions that will introduce the topic. Run them by family and friends to see if they are clear and understandable.

Leading:

The "Hear the Spirit" introduction is essentially a brief time of purposefully directed discussion. It sets the tone of the meeting, raises interest level in the topic, and allows everyone time to "warm up" to interacting as a group on deeper issues. You are not trying to elicit answers to questions, but to stimulate fun, meaningful, personal, or interesting discussion that is relevant to the topic. The goal is not to inform, but to engage everyone's participation in the discussion.

You may be tempted to think that this initial part of the HEART outline is not part of a "real" Bible study. You might convince yourself to pass over it quickly, or even just skip it, because "we have so much to cover today." Resist that thinking. In the same way that Jesus often took time to do some talking before telling (such as with the woman at the well), this time can be critical to setting the spirit of the rest of the meeting. The invitation is not just an "ice breaker" but a strategic part of the lesson that will help to connect and unify your group emotionally and spiritually. If you take this first step seriously, it will help your moms begin interacting personally and get them all headed in the same direction for the Bible study part of the lesson.

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Tips for Guiding "Hear the Spirit"

- Ask a general question about a common topic of interest, not a specific question about a biblical text you'll be studying and discussing. The former is open and inviting (everyone can have an opinion); the latter can be perceived as closed and threatening (no one wants to risk having the wrong answer).
- Create a discussion question that relates generally to the study, but that is broad enough that everyone can comment on it with an opinion or insight. Often, a lighter or even humorous question will generate easy discussion. It also helps to set up the question with some relevant personal comments or a story that will stimulate interest.
- As an example, if you were discussing John 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"), you might ask your group: "What would your biographer write for an opening sentence in the book about your life?" or "What are three words that describe who you really are?" or "What 'in the beginning' word or term best describes each of your children?" or "What would it be like to be so close to someone that you are like one person?"
- In lieu of a general question, you can also read and discuss an interesting quote from someone historical or current, from a literary figure or author, from current news or commentary, or from a popular blog. You can also be really creative in this part of your meeting time: hold up an intriguing picture or a photograph, show a movie clip or an online video, play part of a song, or read an interesting poem and discuss it. Anything is an option if it leads you into the topic for the lesson.

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E ENGAGE THE WORD

Purpose: To read and discuss the Bible Study material for the day's lesson with the goal of identifying what God's Word has to say about the topic of study.

Activity: Observation — What does the Bible say?

Time: 30-45 minutes

Planning: Observation is the "head" of an inductive Bible study. You should invest extra time observing all that is in the passages being studied, using other study resources to see beneath the surface text.

Leading:

The "Engage the Word" part of your lesson is the focus of a Mom Heart group study. If you are doing a book study using one of Sally's books, or another author's, you can spend some time talking about the content of the chapter you read for the week. You also should have identified several specific scripture passages from the chapter that can then become the Bible study portion of your time. Be sure to use the Group Lesson Planner form to write some good questions both for the book and for the identified scriptures. Your primary goal in this time is on reading and understanding what those scriptures are saying in relation to the author's message or topic.

You will need to guide the discussion to keep it centered primarily on observation—simply understanding what the Bible is saying about your topic. It is natural for the group to jump into interpretation and application, but try to gently guide the discussion back into more general observation at this point. Help your group put themselves in the original readers' time and circumstances in order hear the words in the same way those original recipients would have heard them. Dig out as many of the grammatical, linguistic, and historical gems from the passages as you can before moving on to interpretation.

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Tips for Guiding "Engage the Word"

- If you are using a book or other resource that already provides directed discussion questions for the chapter or lesson, be sure you have done them yourself the week before, and reviewed the questions prior to your group meeting. Write down your own personal observations about the Bible passages being studied, and then begin to create some group questions based on your own insights.
- Leading an effective Mom Heart group requires more than just reading questions and then waiting impatiently for answers, or worse, providing the answers yourself. You are not there to emcee a two-way Q&A time (you ask; they answer), but rather to stimulate a lively conversation among the group members. You are a facilitator, which means you are there to listen, draw out, engage, acknowledge, encourage, affirm, and direct. That's the real challenge and joy of being the leader of a Bible study or discussion group—leading others into a rich and meaningful conversation about God and His truth.
- You do not need to be a Bible scholar to lead a Mom Heart group discussion. However, the more you take time to study and review the passages of a lesson prior to your group, the easier and more effective it will be for you to lead a satisfying discussion. Build a small library of proven Bible study tools that will help you gain more insight into the passages of the lesson—a concordance for the Bible version you use; a Bible handbook or encyclopedia; a word study resource; a study Bible; and a topical Bible. You can also take advantage of free online Bible study websites, or Bible study software for your computer.

A — AFFIRM THE TRUTH

Purpose: To engage the group to synthesize one "big idea" that will express the content and the intent of the passages and material that have been studied and discussed in that day's lesson.

Activity: Interpretation — What does the Bible mean?

Time: 10-15 minutes

Planning: Interpretation is the "heart" of an inductive Bible study. Do your own interpretation first, then consult concordances, commentaries, and other helps to have a firm grasp on the material.

Leading:

The "Affirm the Truth" part of your meeting time is the next step of inductive Bible study—interpretation. In this step, you are helping your group extract the true meaning (God's intent) from the scriptures they have observed and discussed. It is part of the process that will move biblical truth from the head (intellectual) into the heart (personal). Interpretation is determining just what a passage means—what does God want you to know, to be, to do, or to believe about His truth. As you begin to answer any or all of those questions, you will be interpreting the author's content and intent.

Observation is mostly about information, but interpretation is about revelation. Interpretation is the step that makes us responsible for a response to what God has revealed. It is where we define what God's intent is in what He has said. At this point, you want your group to think about all the passages they have discussed and to summarize in one sentence the gist of God's heart or intent. One way to do that is to write a "Big Idea" sentence together. There are instructions on the next page for how to do that, or you can just come up with your own approach. The main thing is to summarize what you have discussed in one clear and concise statement.

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Tips for Guiding "Affirm the Truth"

- Be sure you take time prior to your group meeting to synthesize what you studied in the lesson into a summary statement of your own. It is not so you can tell the group what you think the study is all about, but so you can lead them to create their own "big idea" statement. Your knowledge of the lesson will enable you to direct them as they summarize the most important truths from the passages discussed into a statement.
- Don't linger too long on minutiae, but help the group quickly identify the most salient truths learned in that day's lesson and craft them into a single "big idea" sentence. It will help to have one of the members writing as the other members talk so you can be free to lead the discussion. The final sentence should be clear and concise so that it is a memorable "take home" thought that cogently summarizes what was learned that day.
- If you need a model for how to write a formal "Big Idea" statement, it's not hard to learn. It is simply a complete sentence with a subject and a complement. The subject expresses "What did the lesson talk about?" and the complement expresses "What did the lesson say about what was talked about?" The subject is not a single word such as discipleship, but rather the opening clause of a sentence: "Discipleship is an intentional relationship..." The complement completes the subject's thought. "Discipleship is an intentional relationship that requires training, instruction, and modeling."
- There is no right or wrong way for this summarization exercise, so your group can be as flexible and creative as they want to be in crafting a "big idea" statement. If they seem hung up on the formal "Big Idea" form, just encourage them to put that aside and to write their own one sentence summary statement however they want to express it. The process is far more important than the form.

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R — RESPOND TO GOD

Purpose: To encourage each mom in the group to take the time to write down a brief personal response or application to the lesson as expressed in the "big idea" statement.

Activity: Application — What does the Bible mean to me?

Time: 5 minutes

Planning: Application is the "hands" of an inductive Bible study. It is considering how God wants you, personally, to live out in your daily life and family the truths you have found in the passage.

Leading:

The "Respond to God" part of your meeting time is designed to provide a moment of quiet reflection in response to the Bible study and discussion. It is the third and final step of inductive Bible study—application. Encourage the group to consider quietly how the lesson, as expressed in the "big idea" that the group has just crafted together, impacts each of their lives personally. Remind them that there is no one way to respond, but that the Spirit of God can speak individually to each of them through the passages.

Encourage each mom to write down her personal application in the study guide or on a sheet of paper. This step is important because it allows the group members time to individually synthesize the head, heart, and hands truths that they have been discussing. Writing down thoughts can help to personalize and internalize lessons and truths learned from Bible study. This application step also prepares each group member to open her heart to God in prayer in the final part of the meeting. As the group leader, you should encourage the group to take this step seriously, and then be sure to model it as well in your own response to the lesson.

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Tips for Guiding "Respond to God"

- Use this step to bring the Bible study and discussion part of your group meeting to a natural ending point, and to create a brief but natural transition to the final part of the meeting time.
- Encourage everyone in the group to silently contemplate and reflect on the lesson you have just studied. Repeat the "big idea" summary statement just created. Give them just a few minutes (3-4) to write down their thoughts about what the Spirit of God might be saying to them personally. There's no form or format to the personal response. Explain that what they are writing is like a short personal journal entry.
- Some moms may not be accustomed to this kind of reflective response to Scripture, or may even be a bit resistant to going beyond just agreeing with the statement. You can "prime the well" for everyone in the group by offering a bit of your own testimony as to what the Spirit says to you about the lesson. Keep it brief, succinct, and personal (i.e., don't start teaching or preaching about it). You're providing a model and example of how to hear God's Word and respond personally to it.
- Because this is a critical step in the HEART process, be sure you have pens and paper available so everyone can write down what they are thinking. Some may want to simply think about it, but encourage everyone to commit their thoughts to paper. There is a head and heart connection that happens in brain chemistry when mental words are written out. Writing can help to internalize a lesson.

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T — TAKE IT TO HEART

Purpose: To share and discuss personal responses to the lesson, and to pray together as a group about living out the truths learned in this lesson, and about needs of the group members.

Activity: Supplication — What does the Bible mean to us?

Time: 10-15 minutes

Planning: Supplication is the conclusion of your group study. Prepare beforehand a list of suggested prayers related to the study that you can offer during this time for prayer responses and requests.

Leading:

The "Take It to Heart" conclusion of your meeting time is for the purpose of responding to God in prayer as a group. It is the idea that God has been speaking to you through the study of His Word, and now you will speak to Him in prayer. Though often overlooked, prayer is the first and most important application you can make about any study of the Word—to talk with God about what He is saying to you. In many ways, this final step is the real personal "application" for adults—not just something to do, but going to God and talking to Him about what He has said in His Word.

We sometimes trivialize the idea of application by trying to create artificial tasks or actions that we think will please God, meet His standards, or gain His approval. But God is not primarily concerned with these often superficial "sacrifices" of obedience. The offering He really desires from us is a "contrite heart" (Psalm 51:16-17). This step of supplication is simply opening our hearts to God—taking our needs, desires, failures, and hurts to Him and humbly asking Him to respond. This final part of your meeting is a time to pray to God as a group for one another, and for your group. It is a time to speak to God about what God has spoken to you.

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Tips for Guiding "Take It to Heart"

- Briefly remind your group about general prayer time guide-lines: (1) Be brief: Keep requests and prayers brief so everyone will have an opportunity to share and to pray; (2) Be relevant: Limit prayer requests to people and topics that are relevant to or known by the group; and (3) Be appropriate: Refrain from sharing personal details and stories about family or personal problems and conflicts that should remain confidential.
- Ask one of the moms to write down prayer requests, and then have her read all the requests out loud. If your group is comfortable praying, hearing the prayer requests will be enough to get praying. If your group is new, or some are not as confident praying, ask for a volunteer to pray for each individual request as the list is read. If time is short, ask two or three of the group members you know are comfortable with praying to pray, or you can just close in prayer yourself. Don't ever lecture or shame the group about prayer. Provide a model of prayer, and trust God to draw them out in His timing. Be flexible and gracious.
- Ask for a volunteer to open the prayer time, and let the group know that you will close the time of prayer. This will enable you to control when to end your group meeting time so it doesn't go too long. After closing with the "Amen," let your group members know that you will email the shared prayer requests to them, and encourage them to keep one another in prayer. Thank everyone for coming and let them know when and where the next group meeting is scheduled. If time allows, invite them to stay for refreshments and fellowship.

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HINTS: The Model

Getting Your Group Talking

- ⇒ Introverts: Introversion is not a personality weakness; it is a personality type designed by God with unique strengths and insights that your group needs. Extraverts tend to think out loud; introverts think inside. It is not uncommon for extraverts to dominate discussions, so an introvert might have something insightful to add but will miss the opportunity because a verbal extravert has already moved the conversation in a different direction. As group leader, be sure to invite responses from introverts, and give them time to think out their thoughts (you might need to restrain the extraverts). Become aware of who are the introverts and extraverts in your group, as well as what your own personality type is and how you interact.
- ⇒ Discussion Questions: As group leader, you will need to create discussion questions both ahead of time and on the fly. A good discussion question should be: simple (not complex or multifaceted), short (concise with minimal elaboration), sweet (not controversial), strategic (accomplishes a purpose for the meeting), and stimulating (enjoyable for everyone to talk about). A good discussion question should NOT be: closed (asking for a yes or no, right or wrong response), loaded (asked with a personal hidden agenda), rhetorical (asked with a desired outcome), or confusing (inviting moral or ethical ambiguity). Good questions will create good discussion.
- ⇒ Silence: Most people will try to avoid silence, which can feel awkward and uncomfortable. However, silence can allow time for the Holy Spirit to work in hearts and minds. When the air goes dead in your group, gently suggest some lines of reflection or consideration to direct group members' thoughts, or ask a spiritually engaging question. Resist giving your own thoughts, and encourage the group to share theirs.

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- ⇒ Leader Dependence: Beware of unintentionally cultivating a dependence on yourself as the leader of the group for content and discussion. As a small group leader, the purpose of your preparation is not just to teach a lesson, but rather to facilitate a discussion. Since you will spend more time preparing the lesson, it will be natural for you to have a lot to say. However, a group can easily become dependent on you for discussion and insights. The more you allow that dependency to grow into a habit, the less the group will feel the need to interact. Teach when you need to, but always keep your main focus on facilitating and stimulating a discussion among your group members. They, not just you, are the life of your group.
- ⇒ Participation: Invite your moms to become invested in the group by sharing in some of the regular responsibilities—bringing a snack or dessert; taking and organizing study and discussion notes for the group; recording prayer requests to email to the group; coming early to pray for the group. Giving others specific ways to be involved in the life of the group helps them feel it is "their" group and not just "her" (your) group. Ownership feeds participation.
- ⇒ Prayer Beginning-Ending: The closing prayer time needs a clear beginning point. You can simply ask the question: "What is on your heart that we can pray about today?" Even more important, though, the closing prayer time also needs a clear ending point. The easiest rule of group meeting etiquette to break is to not end on time. Going long in the closing prayer is probably the most common place to break the rule. It honors everyone in the group for you to end the meeting on time, so be ready to be the closer.

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Section 6: The Mission GROWING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

Growth takes time. Jesus' model for discipleship was intentional, relational, and patient. He intentionally invested in the lives of a handful of disciples who went out and invested relationally in the lives of others. The growth of Jesus' ministry did not happen overnight, and you should not expect quick growth for your group either. Be patient, but move forward with intentional purpose to grow your Mom Heart group. God is looking for your faithfulness, not your fruitfulness. Fruitfulness always follows faithfulness.

Your priority as a leader should never be only to pursue growth in numbers. The number of moms involved in your group or ministry can certainly indicate a healthy and thriving group, but it should not become an artificial or counterfeit measure of success that tempts you to place your confidence as a leader on the wrong indicator. Your priority should be growth in Christ—to build up your moms in the Lord and help them grow in spiritual maturity. And yet even that is not the end purpose of your group.

If the Spirit of God is a river of living water flowing into the life of your group, it is meant to flow in you, through you, and then out to others. If it all goes in but then nothing flows out, your group can eventually become stagnant, and no longer living or growing. The ultimate purpose of your group is not just to grow, but to grow out and reach other women. That's the kind of biblical growth that will make a difference—growth in spiritual maturity expressed in a heart for reaching out to others.

Look at the list of possible kinds of Mom Heart groups again in Section 1. There are many mothers in the body of Christ and in your community who are minimalized, marginalized, and even neglected. They need the hope and encouragement that you are finding in your

group. If you are growing in Christ, then you have truth and grace to offer other mothers who are thirsty. When you do that as a group, united in purpose and motivated by love for Christ and others, you will show the world that you are His disciples. Here's an acrostic that summarizes this kind of vision for your GROUP:

Go Reach Others Uniting in Purpose.

G — Go: Initiate

Don't wait for moms to approach you! Prayerfully consider moms you know who may be interested in your group, or need to be in a Mom Heart group, and then take the initiative to go and seek them out. Depending on the size and nature of your group, you can invite them to join your group, or even start a new one for them. You may be motivated, and even gifted, to minister to mothers, but it won't happen until you go, until you initiate.

R - Reach: Invite

Some women won't respond to a general announcement about a group. Perhaps they feel they're too busy, or they're insecure about responding to a stranger, or they just don't want to risk rejection, or they don't feel worthy to be in the group. Whatever the reason, when you reach out personally, it tells them you're interested in them and that they're welcome in your group. Sometimes all someone needs is to be asked!

O — Others: Include

There can be an appropriate time for an exclusive group—if you're limited on size; if it's a special needs group; when you are building strategically into the lives of a few committed women; or many other special situations. However, always keep in mind that God's kingdom is inclusive—it is offered to all who will come to Christ. Being biblically inclusive as a group means always looking out for others who need to be included, to invite them in or to help them find a group.

U — Uniting in: Inspire

History has been changed by small groups of people united in a common purpose and inspired by a shared vision. You may not change history, but you can change the lives of many mothers through your small group. The mothers you inspire will go on to touch their own families, and other mothers. Always communicate a higher vision for your group, then let the Spirit unite you in reaching for it. You are inspiring eternity-changers.

P — Purpose: Influence

Every day women are fed a steady diet of half-truths and even lies about motherhood by the prevailing culture. What they hear is rarely, if ever, biblical, affirming, or visionary. But you can influence other mothers with biblical truth about God's heart, design, and purpose for motherhood. You have the opportunity to influence other women by helping them find eternal purpose and meaning in their lives at home. Your influence is purposeful and powerful.

HINTS: The Mission

Thinking About Growing

- ⇒ Initiate: Women attending your Mom Heart group will likely represent a variety of cultural backgrounds from within your community. Sometimes, you may need to wear your "brave face" to initiate conversations with moms in many settings—swim lessons, soccer practice, on Facebook, at church, and even when buying curriculum. Just step out in faith.
- ⇒ **Invite**: The women who become a part of your group will probably mention how grateful they are that you stepped out of your comfort zone to initiate a conversation and invite them to your group. Not many others will. Just ask.
- ⇒ Include: Be aware of women who might be marginalized or minimalized and reach out to include them in your group. Look for "mom hearts" that need to be encouraged and helped. You will be touching the life of a woman who is giving life to the next generation.
- ⇒ **Inspire:** With no support from culture, or even from churches at times, many Christian moms have lost their heart for biblical motherhood. You have the opportunity to inspire them with hope that God's design for motherhood is a divine calling with eternal purpose and spiritual blessing.
- ⇒ Influence: Many women are gifted and motivated, but not so many possess spiritual confidence or feel the personal freedom as a woman to exercise the gifts of influence they have from God. If you are that mom, know that it's OK for you to own your own influence, and to exercise that influence by faith with God's direction. After all, it's His influence.

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Section 7: The Mothers FEEDING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

You cannot offer living water to the mothers in your group if your own spiritual well is not filled up. This guide can equip you with practical skills to start, lead, and tend a group. However, those skills will not make you a spiritual life-giver. Only the Spirit of God, filling your own spirit, will enable you to encourage and influence other mothers in the Lord. That kind of personal ministry comes from the overflow of a heart that is filled up with the Spirit of Christ.

The apostle John declared that Jesus is the Word, the *logos*, the full expression of all that God is. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, *full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14, italics added). John goes on to say "the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (1:17). We're no longer bound to the burdensome regulations of the Law of Moses to know God. Instead, we are now freed by grace and truth in Jesus to know God in our spirits. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2)

All that Jesus was "full" of, we can now be filled with—the *grace* that brings us close to the merciful and loving God, and the *truth* that keeps us secure in our knowledge of Him. Now that we are, by faith, "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3-14), we can live from the inside out—His grace and truth working its way out in our lives. But that "inside-out" kind of life will happen only if we stay spiritually nourished by feeding our hearts and minds with His spiritual food—God's grace is food for the heart (or spirit), and God's truth is food for the mind. Following are some simple ways to think about how you can stay spiritually nourished in order to have spiritual nourishment to offer to others:

GRACE: Nourished by Prayers and People

Prayer is turning your spirit toward God to commune with Him. Prayer is arguably the most faith-affirming of the spiritual disciplines because through it you acknowledge you believe that God exists, that He listens, and that He will respond to you personally (Hebrews 11:6). Prayer opens your heart to the grace of God in a way nothing else can. In prayer, you experience His presence and His personal involvement in your life—the life of God intersecting your own life. You need the grace of His life living in your heart in order to serve the moms of your group. So, feed on God's grace in prayer.

In the same way that you can give God's grace to others, you can also receive God's grace for yourself. When you fellowship with other godly people who are feeding on God's grace in prayer, you are nourished by the overflow of their spirits, and your heart is spiritually encouraged and strengthened in their presence. Their faith feeds your faith, and fills your heart. Timothy received that same kind of grace from his friend and mentor Paul, and Paul had Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," to be a source of grace in his life. You need that grace in your life, too, so find a godly friend or mentor who will pray for you and encourage you, and make time to spend time with them. It will nourish your spirit.

TRUTH: Nourished by the Word and Words

If prayer is you speaking to God, then reading His Word is God speaking to you. The truth of the Scriptures is food for your mind—spiritual nourishment for growing in maturity, faith, and wisdom. There is "milk" for the immature believer, and there is "meat" for the mature (Hebrews 5:11-14). God's Word is "living and active" and goes deep into your "soul and spirit" (4:12). It is "inspired by God and profitable" for all that will make you mature (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is God revealing His mind and heart to you, teaching you to be His follower, explaining spiritual realities, and guiding you with wisdom for life. You need His truth to teach others to follow Him. So, feed on God's truth in His Word.

In the same way you learn from God by reading and studying His Word on your own, you also learn from others who feed on God's Word and share what they learn in messages and books. Their words can inspire, instruct, explain, explicate, and expand on the truths of God's Word in ways you might miss. When you listen to or read the words of others who study and think deeply about God's Word, you are nourished by the overflow of their maturity, wisdom, and insight—your mind is shaped by their words. So, feed on God's truth in the messages, books, and writings of other godly believers you respect and trust.

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You cannot offer living water to the mothers in your group if your own spiritual well is not filled up. Feed on God's grace and truth so you will be able to feed others from His grace and truth.

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.. Those left behind had reason to feel hopeless, yet in the aftermath of the defeat and destruction, Jeremiah could still declare to the people of Israel: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I have hope in Him'" (Lamentations 3:21-224).

There are many reasons that moms can come to your Mom Heart group feeling defeated, depressed, and without hope. Life can be hard, and hope can be fleeting. But you have the opportunity to be a Jeremiah to your moms, to declare God's love, faithfulness, and mercy, and to remind them that our hope is in Christ and in the faithfulness of God. That word of hope must come from a heart that, like Jeremiah's, has recalled to mind, every morning, the blessings and provisions of God. The grace and truth that you bring to your moms' hearts will give them the hope they need to be faithful.

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HINTS: The Mothers Giving from a Full Spirit

- ⇒ Family: It should be self-evident, but sadly too often it isn't—if your life at home is out of order, then your spiritual life will be out of order. You can't give from a full spirit if your heart is divided and distracted by unresolved stress or discord at home. Be honest with yourself and your group about the state of your heart.
- ⇒ Place at Home: Be sure to have your own personal space at home where you can retreat for times of quiet and spiritual refreshment, if only for a few minutes. Create a "mom's place" with things that minister to your spirit—comfy chair, books, music, candles, pictures, plants.
- ⇒ Get Away: Different personalities will retreat in different ways, but the idea of getting away is biblical and basic. We need to separate ourselves occasionally from media, daily routines, distractions, and everything else that keeps us from focusing on our emotional needs and spiritual health. And yes, we can even need time away from people. Plan a weekend getaway however often you need to in order to tend to your spirit.
- ⇒ Worship: Music is processed in a different part of the brain. If music is the language of worship, we need to be training that part of our brain with good music. There is a mysterious but very real effect that music has on the spirit by God's design, so feed your spirit with music regularly.
- ⇒ Self-Acceptance: If you cannot accept yourself as God has made you, then you stand to miss much of the Spirit's work and leading in your life. Learning to "love...yourself" is part of your spiritual nature. God accepts you unconditionally, and wants to use you just as you are.

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Section 8: The Materials TENDING YOUR MOM HEART GROUP

All it really takes to start a Mom Heart group is some moms with open hearts and open Bibles. However, you'll likely want more than that to help you keep your group growing, and to go deeper as mothers who are after God's heart. That's where other thoughtful and relevant books, materials, and resources come into the picture—tools to help you dig deeper and to build a strong group.

Our vision for Mom Heart is about building people, not building an organization. It has never been our intent to conceive and control the content of every Mom Heart group. Rather, our intent has always been to encourage, equip, and enable mom-hearted mothers to minister to other moms. It's not about becoming a bigger ministry, but about becoming better ministers. It's all about inspiring you, training you, and giving you the tools you need to accomplish three basic tasks of being a Mom Heart group leader:

- Starting: Getting Your Group Going
- Leading: Giving Your Group Direction
- Tending: Growing Your Group Personally

If we can help you be confident and fruitful in those three tasks, then we know God will be faithful to take it from there. The resources listed on the following pages are books, materials, and media we have written, created, and published for Whole Heart and Mom Heart. It will always be an incomplete list, but it is always completely sufficient to equip you for ministry. Most of the materials are available on the Mom Heart Online page, or in the Whole Heart Online Store.

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Print Books

- The Mission of Motherhood, Sally Clarkson Sally's foundational book about God's biblical design and heart for motherhood. Recommended for new groups.
- *The Ministry of Motherhood*, Sally Clarkson Sally's followup book about following the example of Jesus' relationship with His disciples in mothering.
- Seasons of a Mother's Heart, Sally Clarkson Essays on motherhood for Christian and homeschooling mothers. Extensive Bible study and discussion questions.
- Your Mom Walk with God, Sally Clarkson An exploration
 of what it means to walk with God as a mother. Personal stories, biblical insights, discussion questions.
- Dancing with My Father, Sally Clarkson Personal and biblical insights on how you can live with joy and grace as a woman, wife, and mother even when life is difficult.
- Desperate: Hope for the Mom Who Needs to Breathe, Sarah
 Mae and Sally Clarkson Encouragement and hope for
 young moms struggling under the burdens of motherhood.
- You Are Loved, Sally Clarkson and Angela Perritt An eightweek guided Bible study with commentary on "embracing the everlasting love God has for you."
- Own Your Life, Sally Clarkson A personal, biblical, and motivational call to Christian women to "own" the life, opportunities, and ministry God has given to them.
- 10 Gifts of Heart, Sally Clarkson Biblical and practical insights about ten qualities of heart to build into your children before they leave your home.
- The Lifegiving Home, Sally Clarkson and Sarah Clarkson Personal insights throughout the year for making your home a place of belonging and becoming

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- The Lifegiving Home Experience, Sally Clarkson and Joel Clarkson — A 12-month companion study guide built around holidays and traditions.
- The Lifegiving Table, Sally Clarkson Biblical insights, family stories, and personal recipes for how to nurture faith through feasting at your table, one meal at a time.
- The Lifegiving Table Experience, Joel and Joy Clarkson A
 companion study guide based on a guided journey through
 the concept of feasting in the Bible.
- The Lifegiving Parent, Clay Clarkson and Sally Clarkson —
 Biblical insights and personal stories for how to bring the life of
 God into the life of your home for your children.
- The Lifegiving Parent Experience, Clay Clarkson and Sally Clarkson — A 10-week guided study through each chapter, illustrated in the life of a fictional lifegiving family.
- Mom Heart Moments, Sally Clarkson A year of daily devotions for mom-hearted lifegiving moms, drawn from Sally's forty years of motherhood and ministry.
- Awaking Wonder, Sally Clarkson A memoir and model, drawn from 30+ years of homeschooling, for how to open your child's heart to the wonder and beauty of learning.
- The Awaking Wonder Experience, Clay Clarkson and Sally Clarkson — A guided supplementary companion study guide based on concepts explored in Awaking Wonder.
- Help, I'm Drowning, Sally Clarkson Sally's biblical insights and personal stories for how to weather the storms of life with grace and hope.
- Giving Your Words, Clay Clarkson and Sally Clarkson A
 biblical exploration of the lifegiving power of a verbal home
 for family faith formation, with "Our 24 Family Words of Life."
- Heartfelt Discipline, Clay Clarkson A deeply biblical examination of childhood discipline with a new "path of life" model for leading your children to walk with God.

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- Our 24 Family Ways, Clay Clarkson A family devotional and discipleship guide based on 24 expressions of biblical family values, with 120 devotions and much more.
- Educating the WholeHearted Child, Clay Clarkson (with Sally Clarkson) If you lead a group for homeschooling moms, this 384-page book is full of useful material.

Online

- SallyClarkson.com Sally's personal blog for Christian women and mothers since 2007. Inspirational, biblical, and insightful posts by Sally.
- AtHomewithSally.com Sally's podcast for Christian women and mothers since 2015. Personal, heart-to-heart encouragement by Sally.
- LifewithSally.com Sally's subscription membership online community since 2018. Filled with original monthly messages, special content, and legacy conference messages.
- WholeHeart.org Whole Heart Online provides information about Whole Heart Ministries, books and resources, and other helps for Christian families.

Social Media

- **Instagram** https://www.instagram.com/sally.clarkson/
- Facebook https://www.facebook.com/therealsallyclarkson
- Also on Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube

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GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Levery movement of God is like a train. In order for it to move it must have two things: (1) it needs fuel for its engine, and (2) it needs tracks to run on. For Mom Heart, vision is the fuel, and values are the tracks. Vision is the end one believes a movement can achieve—to change hearts, minds, wills, ways, motives. Values are the means one believes will achieve the ends—beliefs, convictions, data, plans, actions, When the engine is fired up with the fuel of vision, and the wheels are running along the tracks of values, there is a movement. Every Christian movement is defined by its vision and values.

Mom Heart is a movement of God. Rather than trying to build an organization, our goal is to build a movement of mothers who are ministering to other mothers. Our role is not to organize and control, but to encourage, equip, and enable mothers to "restore moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood." To keep the Mom Heart movement from losing steam or going off the rails, though, it is critical that everyone who wants to be a Mom Heart group leader should understand, share, and wholeheartedly affirm the vision and values that define this movement. We all need to have the same destination in view (our vision) and be on the same path to get there (our values). That is the purpose of this *Mom Heart Group Leader Manual* and the two documents that follow.

What Is a "Vision and Values Covenant"?

The term "covenant" may sound a little official or serious to you, but it is really just a promise—a mutual agreement made between two parties. In our case, our covenant is a personal promise, made between you and us, to preserve and promote the vision and values that define Mom Heart Ministry. It is not a law, or an enforceable document of some kind, but simply a mutual pact made between us as mom-hearted mothers. Our hope is that each group, whether here in the states or around the world, that takes the name Mom Heart will, at its heart, be known for certain qualities. Agreeing to adhere to our vision and values in this covenant will help insure that we are all on the same tracks.

And, no, we do not require you to sign a document and send it in to prove your loyalty. We trust the Holy Spirit, not rules and laws, to build this movement. Rather, all we ask is that you carefully and prayerfully read the "Mom Heart Vision and Values Covenant" and decide if what we are trying to build is something you can wholeheartedly support. Think of the covenant as a self-evaluation tool—listen to the Spirit in your own heart, and discern if God is directing you to become a Mom Heart group leader. You will know. We hope he is. We would love to encourage, equip, and enable you to join us in this movement of "coming home to God's heart for motherhood." If you are all aboard on this train, then God can you use to change the world, one mom at a time.

What Is a "Statement of Faith"?

The popular proverb asserts, "If you don't stand for something you'll fall for anything." Although it is doubtful the language of the early church would have produced a similarly pithy and clever maxim, there is no doubt they adhered to the same belief. The earliest creeds were written by church councils to express the fundamental beliefs of the new Christian religion and church, often in response to false teachers and competing belief systems. The Apostles' Creed has evolved over time, but it is a succinct statement of beliefs from the early church. The Nicene Creed is attributed to the Council of Nicaea in 325, and was revised in 381 by the Council of Constantinople. It is, in various forms, the most common creedal expression of the Christian faith in use today. It is the standard for Christian orthodoxy.

The Protestant Reformation, begun in 1517, generated countless confessions, canons, consensuses, declarations, articles, and all variety of statements to define the beliefs and practices of the re-formed church that had separated itself from Catholicism. With the rapid spread of denominationalism, every subsequent expression of the church needed its own Statement of Faith to differentiate itself from all the other expressions of the church. Today, a typical Statement of Faith generally will serve two distinct purposes: (1) to show alignment with the orthodox beliefs and doctrine common to all Christians, and (2) to show alignment with the theological beliefs and doctrine specific to a Christian denomination, movement, or system. In the denominational era, it's less about standing for something so you don't fall into error, and more about, "You can't tell the players without a scorecard."

Why Does Mom Heart Need These Documents?

Mom Heart Ministry is not a church or a theological school. It is a parachurch movement. That simply means we come "alongside" (*para*) the church to help. A parachurch organization is typically independent from the church so it can serve across denominational lines. The modern parachurch movement began in the early 1950s with the growth of Evangelicalism, and is now a major component of American Christianity. Most parachurch organizations have a Statement of Faith for the same reason as a church—to help those coming to it know where it fits in the broad field of beliefs and practices.

Mom Heart Ministry has a Statement of Faith for two reasons: (1) to align ourselves with historic Christian belief, and (2) to provide boundaries for moms who want to call their group a "Mom Heart" group. We want the words Mom Heart to mean some very specific things, but we also want them to not mean some other things. Our Statement of Faith is a general expression of beliefs because we want to include mothers in as many church and theological traditions as we possibly can. However, because it is a summary statement of faith, it is vulnerable to group leaders and members who would want to fill in the doctrinal gaps with their own theological beliefs. Our Vision and Values Covenant is our attempt to prevent that from happening. The two documents together express the beliefs and practices that define Mom Heart Ministry. If you want to start or be a Mom Heart group, we simply ask that you can affirm and embrace the things that make us Mom Heart, as expressed in these documents.

VISION AND VALUES COVENANT

OUR VISION

Mom Heart Ministry is a Christian movement and informal network of small groups for mothers that seeks to restore moms' hearts to God's heart for motherhood. We believe God's eternal purpose for mothers was evident at creation in His design for marriage and the family. Our vision is to encourage, equip, and enable mothers to start, lead, and tend Mom Heart groups around the world.

OUR VALUES

We value GOD'S WORD, not opinions. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group discussion grounded in what the Bible says, in historical and biblical context, to us today. She does not allow herself or others to promote or defend outside "experts" or personal opinions that can displace the work of the Spirit.

We value CHRIST, not theologies. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group discussion focused ultimately on the person and work of Christ. She does not allow herself or others to promote or defend systematic theologies, personal dogmas, church traditions, or controversial views that create conflict or discord.

We value LOVE, not expectations. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group discussion focused on expressing love and acceptance of one another. She does not allow herself or others to add extra-biblical expectations or conditions to the love and forgiveness of Christ offered unconditionally in His gospel.

We value GRACE, not laws. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group attitudes focused on our grace and freedom in Christ. She does not allow herself or others to express Christian laws and rules that create a burden of guilt by requiring works or specific beliefs of any kind in return for God's favor or blessing.

We value SPIRIT, not control. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group life and activities focused on listening and responding to the Holy Spirit's direction. She does not allow herself or others to exercise formal control that is more concerned about form than function, at the expense of the Holy Spirit's leading.

We value PEOPLE, not tasks. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group life and activities focused on the needs of people made in God's image and loved by Him. She does not allow herself or others to let the accomplishing of tasks and projects distract from or displace a sensitivity to the people being served.

We value MINISTRY, not exclusion. — A Mom Heart leader keeps group life and activities focused on loving and serving others inside and outside the group. She does not allow herself or others to become comfortable, complacent, and cliquish, but looks for ways to reach out, serve, and include others.

loving and serving others inside and outside the group. One does not allow herself of others to become
comfortable, complacent, and cliquish, but looks for ways to reach out, serve, and include others.
☐ I will affirm and embrace the Vision and Values of Mom Heart Ministry. Date:

STATEMENT OF FAITH

WHAT MOM HEART BELIEVES

Mom Heart Ministry is a small groups and teaching initiative of Whole Heart Ministries, a nonprofit (501c3) Christian organization. Whole Heart Ministries "Statement of Essential Beliefs" (available on WholeHeart.org) is a detailed explanation of the doctrinal beliefs that shape this ministry of teaching and service. The condensed "Mom Heart Statement of Faith" that follows is a more concise statement of the core beliefs that define and direct Whole Heart Ministries and the Mom Heart Ministry initiative.

MOM HEART STATEMENT OF FAITH

WORD: We affirm the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments as they have been faithfully transmitted and accurately translated, as God's complete, true, and trustworthy Word—His finished and inspired revelation to His people, our sole authority in all matters of revealed spiritual truth and biblical history, and our trustworthy guide in all matters of salvation, life, faith, and godliness.

TRUTH: We affirm the essential doctrines of God's Word recognized and accepted as the historic and orthodox Christian faith, and the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ to that faith—His divine-human nature, virgin birth, sinless life, attesting miracles, atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, present spiritual kingdom rule and reign, and future return in glory.

MARRIAGE: We affirm the biblical design for marriage as one man and one woman, united spiritually and physically for life, becoming as one for the purposes of fulfilling God's creation mandate to bear children and to subdue and rule over creation, and for presenting to the world a living picture of the relationship of Christ and His church by serving God together with mutual love and respect.

FAMILY: We affirm the biblical design for the family, blessed by God "in the beginning," for passing faith from one generation to the next, for training and instructing children in the Lord who will honor their parents and fear and follow God, for affirming that every child is a blessing and gift of God to be welcomed and desired, and for picturing the nature and character of the invisible God.

CHURCH: We affirm the biblical priority of the church, which is the visible body of Christ in both its local and universal expressions, in defending and extending the faith entrusted to it, and the absolute necessity of the work of God's Holy Spirit, both in the world and in the believer, for enabling individual Christians to live according to that faith and to grow in godly character and obedience.

☐ I will affirm and embrace the Statement of Faith of Mom Heart Ministry. Date	·
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GROUP PLANNING FORMS

There is no one way to plan for a group meeting. Some moms can do it all in their heads on the go, others do it all ahead of time on paper. Sides can be taken on the matter, but neither way is right or wrong. Our observation is that individual planning style is mostly a matter of personality type and preference, tempered by past training and experience. Whatever your planning style may be, though, the familiar axiom will always be true: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. You should be careful not to under-plan or to over-plan, but you should always be committed to adequately plan.

The Mom Heart group planning forms that we provide are resources you can use if they will be helpful. The forms shown in this book are full sized (8.5"x11") PDFs which can be printed as needed. As the movement and the MomHeart.com website grows, you may find other helpful forms there as well. If you happen to enjoy creating a well-designed form, then generate a PDF of your creation and email it to us and we'll consider adding it to the collection online. The Mom Heart group planning forms currently available include:

- Mom Heart Ministry Action Plan (MAP) This two-page form will guide you through the process of identifying the purpose for your group, and determining what will be needed or required of you in order to start, lead, and tend your group successfully.
- Mom Heart Group Planning Sheet (GPS) This two-page form provides a quick and easy way
 to plan your Mom Heart group meetings or other events. It will help you to insure that everything needed for a good meeting is taken care of or delegated.
- Mom Heart Group Lesson Planner (GLP) This two-page form will walk you through creating
 your own Mom Heart group HEART lesson plan. It will help you to create a clear roadmap for
 leading your group in a meaningful Bible study and discussion.
- Mom Heart Group Member Info Sheet (MIS) This one-page form will help you keep track of
 each of your Mom Heart group members with contact information, family details, important
 dates, interests and involvements, special needs, and hobbies.

Mom Heart Ministry Action Plan (MAP)

Prepared by:	Date:	Page 1
	— PRAY —	
	— PURPOSE —	
Vision — Why do you want to lead	a Mom Heart group?	
Purpose Statement — Why will you	ur group meet?	
	— PLAN —	
Who will participate?		
What will you study?		
When will you meet?		
Where will you meet?		
Where will you meet?		
How will you manage the group?		
Han man da nav autisiasta		
How many do you anticipate?		

Mom Heart Ministry Action Plan (MAP)

Prepared by:	Date:	Page 2			
	— PLAN (Calendar) —				
Important dates and deadlines:					
Printed materials needed:	— PROMOTE —				
Triffed materials needed.					
Online and social media to create:					
Friends to contact:					
Leaders to contact:					
Leader's to contact.					
	– PERSONAL NOTES –				

Mom Heart Group Planning Sheet (GPS)

Day & Date:	Begin & End:	Page 1			
_	DETAILS —				
Name of Group:					
Group Meeting Times:					
Current Book/Study:					
	CONTACTS —				
Location:	Arrive by:				
Directions:					
Hostess:					
Phone: Ema	il:				
Helper:					
Phone: Ema	il:				
_	PLANNING —				
Refreshments					
Materials					
11 24 - 124 .					
Hospitality					
Child Care					
Lesson					

Mom Heart Group Planning Sheet (GPS)

D	ay 8	ਰ Dat	re:		Begin & End:		Page 2
	— CHECKLIST —						
!	1	#	Getting It Done				Do Ву
<u></u>							
	- NOTES -						
#	Me	emos 1	to Self				
\vdash							

Mom Heart Group Lesson Planner (HEART)

Da	ıy & Date:	Lesson#:	Page 1
		— DETAILS —	
Les	sson Title:		
Cu	rrent Book/Study:		
Re	ading Assignment:		
Lo	cation:		
No	tes:		
HE		R THE SPIRIT: Invitation —	10 minutes
#	Discussion Questions / Notes (What is t	he Bible talking about?)	
-			
L	7.10.40		
		E THE WORD: Observation —	45 minutes
H E	ART — ENGAG Scripture Passages / Notes (What does t		45 minutes
			45 minutes

Mom Heart Group Lesson Planner (HEART)

Day & Date:	Lesson#:	Page 2			
HE A RT — AFFIRM TH	E TRUTH: Interpretation —	15 minutes			
Questions to Ask / Notes (What does the Bible mean?)					
Is there something God wants me to KN	OW?				
Is there something God wants me to BE?	Is there something God wants me to BE?				
Is there something God wants me to DO)?				
Is there something God wants me to BEI	LIEVE?				
What is the BIG IDEA?					
> Subject: What did the lesson talk abou	rt?				
> Complement: What did the lesson say	about what we talked about?				
> State the Big Idea of the lesson (Subje	ect + Complement):				
HEART - RESPOND	D TO GOD: Application —	5 minutes			
Personal Reflections (What does the Bible mean	to me?)				
HEAR T — TAKE IT T	ΓΟ HEART: Supplication —	15 minutes			
Prayer Requests (What does the Bible mean to u	us?)				
Prayer requests recorder:					
Special prayer needs:					

Mom Heart Group Member Info Sheet

Name:	Nickname:
— CONTA	ACT INFO —
Home Address:	
Home Phone:	Message OK: Y N ?
Mobile Phone:	Text/VM OK: Y N ?
Work Phone:	Call OK: Y N ?
Work Address:	
Personal Email:	
— FAMII	LY INFO —
Name	Birthday Age
Spouse:	
Child:	
— PROFI	LE INFO —
Birthday:	Anniversary:
Church:	Ministry:
Preferred Bible Versions:	
Spiritual Gift(s):	
Hobbies:	
Activities:	
Family Occupation(s):	
Fav Stores:	
Fav Eateries:	
Fav Foods:	
Fav Beverages:	
Fav Music/Artists:	
Fav Books/Authors:	
Fav Movies/Actors:	
Other:	



Whole Heart Ministries is a Christian home and parenting ministry founded by Clay and Sally Clarkson in 1994. Its mission is to offer help and hope to Christian parents to raise wholehearted children for Christ. Whole Heart Ministries is a nonprofit, federally tax-exempt (501c3), evangelical Christian ministry. Mom Heart Ministry is a strategic ministry initiative of Whole Heart Ministries. For more information contact us at:

Whole Heart Ministries

P.O. Box 3445 · Monument, CO 80132 admin@wholeheart.org | www.wholeheart.org

Our Books

Our books are available from Amazon.com, ChristianBook.com, and other quality online and retail booksellers. Look for our books by the following publishers:

Whole Heart Press
WaterBrook Press
Thomas Nelson
Tyndale Publishers
Bethany House Publishers
Harvest House Publishers

Whole Heart Press is a strategic publishing initiative of Whole Heart Ministries. We public books under five imprints: Whole Heart Books (Christian home and parenting); Mom Heart Books (biblical motherhood and small groups); Storyformed Books (children's literature and storybooks); Family Faith Books (faith formation and discipleship); and Home Again Books (Christian family public domain reprints).