

Happy Back-to- School Eve



You can dream up a year that's out of this world because Jesus has made you part of His mission.

It's one of the most wonderful times of the year. Judging by the way most of us celebrate it, Back-to-School Eve is an unofficial holiday.

Moms can't stop smiling. Dads high-five each other in the school supplies aisle at the store. Kids watch their homes transform from summer fun headquarters to a state-of-the-art education factory. The fend-for-yourself food cabinet gives way to the official pack-your-own lunchbox counter. Backpacks are meticulously assembled. Everyone must submit to the shiny new chore chart. And behold! The September meal plan! The apps are loaded and the iPad is charged to 100 percent. All the little details of Back-to-School Eve add to mom's tidal wave of nostalgia ... well, all except for the fancy iPad.

by Gloria Furman



Everything is awesome. Holding hands at the first family meeting of the school year, we make triumphant resolutions: This year we're going to _____.

But there's also a hint of cynicism in the air. Some want to call it realism: Why bother? This is life we're talking about here. The schedule will likely get adjusted, some homework will likely get lost, and some goals will likely remain unmet. Maybe the cynics were right about the back-to-school buzz. Our enthusiasm will wane and we'll suffer from "good intentions whiplash" sometime in November.

What's a mom to do? My college roommate loved to say, "But here's the thing." But here's the thing: Since Jesus is who He says He is, and since Jesus has done and is doing what He said He would do, then our Back-to-School Eve dreams should be out of this world.

Break out the Back-to-School Eve confetti, because Mom is about to get eschatological. Here's what I mean by that: We can dream up Back-to-School Eve ideas for ourselves and our kids that are "out of this world" because Jesus has made us part of His mission. When we make kingdom goals for ourselves and our family, we display the glory of God as Jesus is making all things new.

Present-Partial and Future-Perfect

I'm not suggesting a "glass half-full" optimism or a "glass half-empty" pessimism about going back to school. The Bible affirms neither of those perspectives, but it teaches us to see life and everything in it the way God sees it: from Him and through Him and to Him. That old saying about being "too heavenly minded" that you're of "no earthly good" is inside out and backward. We have to be heavenly-minded so that we can be of the most earthly good.

Through the school supplies and first day jitters, Moms have to see the present-partial and future-perfect at the same time. I know that sounds like a riddle, and it is easier said than done. But if you've been born again into the new humanity which Jesus is creating by His Spirit, then you also have the mind of Christ.

Just when you thought this wonderful time of the year was all about you being more organized, the Word shows you that Christ is infallibly uniting all things in Himself. (See Eph. 1:10.)

When we make kingdom-oriented goals for ourselves and our family, we display the glory of God as Jesus is making all things new.

Just when you started to worry about things at school going all wrong just like they did last year, the Word reminds you that your Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth. (See Job 19:25.)

Just when you were second-guessing if your family would take the upcoming challenges in stride, the Word proclaims the promise of the Risen One who said He will be with you always, even to the end of the age. (See Matt. 28:20.)

Because of Jesus, a Christian mom's renewed mind is able to dream up back-to-school goals with an eternal perspective. We can see the already/not yet of this age, where Christ's kingdom is here, is coming, and will come. Our Spirit-empowered vision keeps us focused on the ultimate reality. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. (See Titus 2:11.)

We're not oblivious to the pain of living in this fallen world — certainly not. But we don't fix our hearts on the cares of this world. We worship the eternal, incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, and enthroned Son of God. We follow the Man who introduces Himself like this: "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I was dead, but look — I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17-18).

Dream Big. Really Big.

This Jesus invites women to missional motherhood: to follow His pattern, to trust His promises, and to nurture others by the power He provides. Because of the work that Jesus did on the cross to atone for our sin and give us His righteousness, we're free to dream up kingdom-sized dreams for ourselves, our kids, our home, and our time.



Our back-to-school dreams aren't big enough if they don't take into account the fact that our Savior buried our sins in His grave and then burst the cords of death from the inside out. Fear not, mom. Jesus is the First and the Last and the Living One. He owns back-to-school season and every season before and after it. "But from eternity to eternity the LORD's faithful love is toward those who fear Him, and His righteousness toward the grandchildren" (Ps. 103:17).

Your work is not pointless. All of the preparing and planning you are doing, when done unto Christ, is part and parcel of the new creation — that invisible kingdom that is growing like a mustard seed in a garden, and spreading throughout the world like leaven through dough. Back-to-school season is yet another opportunity through which we can live out God's big story, the story that says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). We have to familiarize ourselves with the script of that story: Scripture. It is in the Word of God where we discover that motherhood is not just some societal construction meant to keep noses wiped, homework folders checked, and lunch boxes [somewhat] healthy. Motherhood is part of God's mission; the nature of our nurturing is missional. We have to renew our minds with that fact, enjoin our affections to wholeheartedly love it, and strengthen our hands and feet to follow suit. So long as we think of ourselves as our own, then we will miss the joy of living out the reality of Galatians 2:19-20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Like I said earlier, I know this is easier said than done. It's easier to write about truth than it is to love it. I sat in the nurse's office at school last semester, grouchy about the lunch hour traffic I just braved in order to pick up my child from school who had a fever that was 0.1 over the acceptable temperature. "Seriously? 0.1?" I grumbled to myself. And then the nurse started a conversation with me like this: "I want to come to your church ..." Come again? I remembered in that moment that the Lord does all things well, but it is so hard to love that truth when I'm pretending that I am Him. So when you're not feeling it, think it. Renew your mind with the Word of God. Commit precious, limited time to diving deep into God's Word. Lose sleep if you have to. It's worth it. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. There is nothing God could do or will or say that we can call inconsequential or petty or boring or beneath us to think about. His Word is our very life.

To think that God has called us to meaningful mission in our motherhood is enough to thrill our hearts, move our feet, and open our mouths in praise of His glorious grace. Where will He send us and our kids this school year? We may imagine that we are sending ourselves along to this class or that conversation, but since Jesus is who He says He is and He has made us His ambassadors, we

Our back-to-school dreams aren't big enough if they don't take into account the fact that our Savior buried our sins in His grave and then burst the cords of death from the inside out.

dare not think of ourselves merely as free agents who are about to get our coveted me-time back.

Jesus will do as He pleases with time because it belongs to

him. He sends us to volleyball practice, He sends us to the office, He sends us to the places and people we didn't plan to see or talk to. The King sends His ambassadors where He wants, when He wants, with His message, for His own glory, that our joy may be full. We may only be aware of a "God-moment" here and there when "our" time gets fractured by an unplanned trip to the nurse's office or a meeting with another parent. But our King owns all the moments. Every minute of our lives has been numbered by a gracious God who does all things well. He ordained all of our mothering moments "for such a time as this" until Jesus returns. He is always working, always intentional, and always pleased with how He leads his beloved ambassadors.

School Days Just Seem Eternal

Moms in Christ, happy Back-to-School Eve! It is an occasion to remember that in this season of sharpened pencils that will eventually dull and laminated schedules that will eventually fall apart, God has made us part of a new beginning that is never going to end. This back-to-school season has a limit on it, but the new creation does not.

Jesus called Himself "the resurrection and the life," and three days after He was crucified for our sin, He walked out of His grave. This world hasn't been the same since, and by the grace of God, you and I get to live in light of this truth.

On the eve of this next school year, let the new beginning be an occasion for you to dive back into the Word of God to feast on the food your soul needs. Let the Word lift your gaze to the horizon of eternity. May the Spirit of God help you dream up kingdom-sized dreams for your missional mothering this year. Would God make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. Would He give you the grace you need to walk in the good works that He has planned for you since before the foundations of the world. (See 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10.) Now, let's go pray that God's mercy and grace would abound to our kids' teachers! □

Gloria Furman is the author of *Missional Motherhood, Glimpses of Grace, Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full, and The Pastor's Wife*.