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STORIES OF MOTHERHOOD,
FAITH & THE ACADEMY



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DIVVYING UP LOVE

SCHOLARLY AMBITION AND MOTHERHOOD
AS SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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IT'S ALMOST THREE O'CLOCK on a Monday afternoon. I'm trying to finish up a bit of writing—frantically skimming and taking notes on a new source that I picked up yesterday—while constantly keeping an eye on the time displayed at the top right-hand corner of my computer screen. Three o'clock, right when my son's school day ends, is when the internal negotiations begin: *Should I keep him at after-school care until four or five, so I can finish taking these notes? Will he be upset that I didn't get him earlier? But I'm in a good writing groove right now, I don't want to lose the momentum. Tomorrow is a long teaching day, so I won't be able to spend as much time with him. Maybe I will just get him sooner and finish up this work later tonight, after he goes to bed.*

This last line of thought, premised on the lure of the academic mother's time flexibility, usually wins out. And just as frequently, at nighttime I don't return to the scholarly work I was doing earlier.

This scenario plays out innumerable times every week. My conflict—choosing between time spent on my scholarship and time spent with my children—resonates with a recent article in *The Atlantic*, where journalist Erika Hayasaki questions the notion, generally assumed in our culture today, that motherhood and the creative life (or fulfilling career/intellectual life) are incompatible. In addition to interviewing several working mothers who shared similar concerns, Hayasaki reveals her own anxieties when she found out she was pregnant with twins:

How would I manage three kids, even with an all-in partner, while also keeping up my journalistic life? I only had so much energy. I would have to divide it. What portion would each family member receive? What portion would that leave for my work? It was not just about energy. It was about divvying up love.¹

Hayashi's confession speaks to the heart of the perceived conflict between being a writer and a mother—a conflict of time, attention, and energy between two fiercely important values: the desire to maintain her creative output and the equally strong desire to be an engaged parent. Moreover, her image of “divvying up love” exemplifies a dominant cultural trope that prevails in our current discourse surrounding the difficulties of managing both motherhood and working life—as one of tension, conflict, and self-division.

This essay explores and interrogates the Christian academic mother's attempt to “divvy up love”: that is, being keenly aware of the *potential* for more (as a scholar, teacher, and leader) and yet also painfully conscious of one's limited capacity because of this season of life. I probe and reflect on what it means to live in the space of constantly partitioning oneself among many loves, especially as it relates to the yearning to maintain an active scholarly life while remaining an actively involved parent. At the same time, I want to be reflective about the language of “divvying up love” and what it connotes and signifies. The other project of this essay is to interrogate the kind of language we use to describe being torn between many loves

¹Erika Hayasaki, “How Motherhood Affects Creativity,” *The Atlantic*, September 13, 2017, www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/09/how-motherhood-affects-creativity/539418/.

and how that language can shape how we think and feel about what we do. My hope is that by being conscious of the terms we use, we can imagine other ways of embodying motherhood and scholarly ambition. I begin by reviewing several recent think pieces written on motherhood and professional life from the past decade, probing their ideas, themes, and language. The second half of the essay will explore how the Bible discusses ambition, identity, and time—using scriptural passages to ponder the weaving of motherhood and scholarly ambition. I will think through how the experience of both motherhood and the research process can be vehicles for sanctification. I conclude with some personal reflection and questions for new academic mothers who desire to continue with an active scholarly life. More than anything, the goal of this essay is to *make visible* and articulate the experience of Christian academic mothers who yearn to be productive in scholarship and feel the pull and responsibility of motherhood. I hope that by simply acknowledging the ambivalence, frustration, and complexity that can accompany the striving for both to coexist, we might actually move forward toward making this coexistence seem less elusive.

WORKING MOTHERHOOD OBSERVED

In the past decade, there have been numerous essays on motherhood and work from academics, journalists, and artists alike.² We live in a cultural moment in which women (and some men) are questioning, more intensely than ever, whether being successful in one's career *and* being an active parent are truly possible. One recurring lament that shows up in many of these essays is the fundamental conflict in time and energy between being devoted to our careers and to our children. Time, according to these authors, is a zero-sum game: there is a finite amount, and time spent on one

²The most notable ones include Anne-Marie Slaughter's cover story, "Why Women Can't Have It All," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>, and Mary Ann Mason, "In the Ivory Tower, Men Only," *Slate*, June 17, 2013, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/06/female-academics-pay-a-heavy-baby-penalty.html>. See www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/06/women-having-it-all-the-debate-so-far/258920/ for a summary of articles in response to Slaughter, as well as www.theatlantic.com/debates/women-workplace/ for an archive of related articles, including interviews with Slaughter.

pursuit (writing, work) is time taken from another (family, children). In these essays, work and motherhood are essentially competitive. So how have women managed the conflict of time and energy between work and family life? What have these essays advised about how to resolve the two?

Number of children and my experience. One option toward mitigating the conflict of time and energy is to have only one child. In her essay in *The Atlantic*, Lauren Sandler quotes Alice Walker’s famous declaration that women “should have children—assuming this is of interest to them—but only one,” since “with one you can move . . . with more than one you’re a sitting duck.”³ This prescription makes sense in a certain way. With one child, the number of parents still outnumbered the child. There is a greater possibility of an equitable division of labor, of handing off childcare responsibilities once your partner can relieve you. When I only had my son, I planned an ambitious research agenda that involved me waking up at six every weekday morning so that I could squeeze in an hour of uninterrupted writing time before he woke. Since he was a good sleeper, with regular hours, this was relatively easy to achieve (notwithstanding my own discipline!). For about a year, I set my alarm for 6 a.m., rolled out of bed and made some tea, and then sleepily shuffled to my desk to devote approximately thirty to forty-five minutes to daily writing. I presented at three national and international conferences that year, including the most prestigious one in my discipline. I felt like a professor-mommy rock star. My days were scheduled down to the half-hour block, requiring tremendous care on my part not to “waste” any time. Even when my son got sick, which he inevitably did because of being in daycare, it did not derail my research goals. My husband and I had organized our respective schedules and childcare responsibilities down to a finely tuned science.

By the time my daughter was born, however, such a carefully calibrated life could no longer persist. Not only did she wake up every night to nurse for over a year, she was also a spotty sleeper. While she napped well during the day, I now had another child to consider during those hours, on top of

³Lauren Sandler, “The Secret to Being Both a Successful Writer and a Mother: Just Have One Kid,” *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2013, www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/06/the-secret-to-being-both-a-successful-writer-and-a-mother-have-just-one-kid/276642/.

teaching three classes and being involved in a very time-intensive university committee. The thought of waking early to accomplish even a little writing seemed to require monumental effort, which I couldn't muster at the time. Even though I was well-versed in the literature that advocated for a daily writing habit (especially early-morning writing) as the key to long-term research success, I couldn't do it. It felt like it was asking too much of myself, even for a determined, disciplined "morning person" like me. I had to shift my writing goals. I began to attend one conference a year. My drive to write and research declined. I was puzzled, even alarmed, by this reduction at first. How could adding one more child seem to occupy so much of my mental, emotional, and intellectual space? Why did one more child make such a difference, even with a partner who remained as involved as he could?

I am still not completely sure why having an additional child made such a difference. Perhaps it was physical—my kids are four years apart, so I was older when I had my daughter, and thus presumably had less energy than with the first one. It was very likely circumstantial as well: four months after my daughter was born, my husband accepted a new job that would require him to commute an hour to an hour and a half each way every day. That new morning routine alone greatly altered our family rhythms and also meant he was not as present to share in domestic responsibilities. But I suspect that the biggest shift was mental and emotional, and perhaps not even a conscious one. Having two children, for me, meant a general acceptance of, maybe even resignation toward, being enmeshed and embedded in the mundane realities of childcare: of double the scheduling and to-do lists and making sure someone is there at pickup. It meant resigning myself to the increased *mental labor* of caretaking—which is somehow harder to share evenly between two partners once another child is added to the mix. The consequence is that this mental load inevitably falls more on one partner than the other (usually the female one), and thus takes over a greater portion of her mental, emotional, and physical life, all of which distracts from the kind of concentrated focus and deep thinking required to do scholarly work. This happened to me after having my second child,

and I acknowledge this reality without regret or resentment. What it meant, however, is that I had to redefine what it looked like for me to pursue a research agenda now that I had less mental space for it.

Given the increased mental labor that comes with having more than one child, another option is to “back down,” as Yael Chatav Schonbrun puts it.⁴ Schonbrun, a psychologist and assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University, describes the choice of remaining in her academic profession at a reduced capacity as one that “allows [her] to be engaged in multiple roles, as a researcher, therapist and home-based mom.” Yet while this choice has enabled her to stay involved in her profession, Schonbrun admits that the greater consequence has been to her sense of self:

It . . . means that my productivity within each role is limited. . . . More painful . . . is sitting in on a research meeting, listening to my colleagues bounce around new project ideas and talk about complex data analytics or new methods. . . . Where I used to feel like a member of the group, and a leader on some projects, I now feel a half step behind. . . . I will continue to be an unknown in my research community. No one is going to ask me to speak about my scientific contributions, because, in all honesty, I just haven’t contributed enough.⁵

Schonbrun honestly admits that the cost of choosing to reduce her research time is a sense of anonymity within her field and the recognition that she cannot participate to the same degree as her colleagues. This diminished sense of professional identity, further complicated by the knowledge of the *potential* to do more, is probably the hardest aspect of choosing to “back down and not bail out” in one’s career. On the one hand, Schonbrun illustrates the notion that some kind of scholarly participation, however small it may feel, is better than none at all. On the other hand, that smaller form of participation can further magnify the sense of alienation one feels from one’s discipline at large.

⁴Yael Chatav Schonbrun, “A Mother’s Ambition,” July 30, 2014, *New York Times*, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/a-mothers-ambitions/>.

⁵Schonbrun, “Mother’s Ambition.”

This paradox—the desire to hold onto my research ambitions and yet being conscious that the very act of holding on means becoming more aware of being a “step behind”—has shaped my own experience of pursuing research as both a mother and a professor at a teaching-intensive institution. It means being constantly satisfied with “enough”—enough time spent on this task, enough sources to fulfill this particular section of literature review, enough revision on the draft as a whole—while recognizing and rejecting the possibility of that alternate self, that fantasy of an idealized writing product “if only” there were more time, institutional resources, or mental space. It is a life of endless circumscription, of compelling myself to restrict, limit, and demarcate. It means resisting the inevitable pull toward expansion. Academia—whether in writing, teaching, or service—is a profession that can always demand more: more time, more energy, and more attention. While this is surely the case for many careers, it is particularly palpable in the exploratory nature of the research and writing process. More time and contemplation spent yields a depth and complexity to one’s ideas that cannot be forced in a shorter span. It is what makes the creation of knowledge interesting and meaningful. And yet I continually find myself needing to limit the pursuit of ideas and arguments simply because there is not enough mental space, even though my intellectual being ardently, even fiercely, yearns to do more.

I want to add that I am not saying that setting limits is not a natural part of the research and writing process. It is evident that any kind of research inquiry requires choosing some paths and foreclosing others. But what I am trying to convey, as Schonbrun so poignantly points out, is that feeling of being “half a step behind” and knowing that this is a choice of my own making. That this choice, like the many related to it, is complicated by numerous other considerations that go beyond my desires and individual will. Is feeling half a step behind better than not joining in at all? To put it another way, is it better *not* to attend the top conferences in my field, where I can feel self-conscious and frustrated at my own lack of achievement compared with those around me, or is it better to still attend and aspire? Even though I have chosen the latter, I wonder sometimes whether I would

feel less divided, and perhaps (to be honest) less about *myself*, if I were to give up my writing goals altogether and instead devote myself more fully to my teaching and family life, as many of my colleagues have chosen, rather than trying to make room for a little of everything.

Conflicting norms. Trying to make room for everything—research, teaching, service, and motherhood, among others—is a symptom of what Sarah A. Birken and Jessica L. Borelli, drawing on Robert Drago’s work, identify as the three norms that make it difficult for “professor mommies” to succeed in the US academy: the motherhood norm, the ideal worker norm, and the individualism norm.⁶ To briefly summarize, the motherhood norm refers to the notion that “women should, for little or no pay, care for their families and others in need.” In academia, the motherhood norm bears out both in a woman’s actual time spent on childcare and in her academic work. For the former, the greater time flexibility afforded in academia often means that women routinely spend more time caring for their children than their spouses. In terms of the latter, it frequently means that women tend to spend more time on teaching and service work compared to male colleagues. The ideal worker norm reflects the idea that the best workers are those who are totally committed to their careers. Given the fluid nature of academic work, in which one can work outside the boundaries of specific locations and certain hours, this norm invariably means that academics could conceivably be working all the time: in the evenings, late at night, and even on weekends. Finally, the individualism norm refers to the idea that institutions should only offer limited help to those in need, effectively leaving many workers fending for themselves when it comes to important supportive services such as childcare.

These three norms, while not specific to academia, are exacerbated by the time flexibility inherent in academic life. Time flexibility is usually considered a good thing, something many commenters have argued actually

⁶Sarah A. Birken and Jessica L. Borelli, “Coming Out as Academic Mothers,” January 15, 2014, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, www.chronicle.com/article/coming-out-as-academic-mothers/. See also Mason, “Ivory Tower;” and Robert W. Drago, *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life* (Boston: Dollars and Sense, 2007).

supports women's careers.⁷ Yet for the academic mother, it actually intensifies the felt impact of the motherhood and the ideal worker norms. The idea that we can work whenever we want, wherever we want, and thus can adjust our work hours and rhythms to our children's schedule, combined with the porous nature of academic work itself, means that theoretically we could be working all the time, beyond a nine-to-five schedule. The academic mother thus experiences two opposing, contradictory impulses: we could always be working (the ideal worker norm), but we could also always be devoting more time to our children (the motherhood norm). These two conflicting ideals are further compounded by the fact that the measures of achievement in academia are relentlessly time bound, encoded in the organizing principle of that prime document of productivity, the academic curriculum vitae, which sorts all categories according to yearly progress: time to publication, annual conference presentations, and so on. Thus, time flexibility for the academic mother means her time outside of the classroom and committee meetings can easily go toward her children, yet her scholarly productivity requires increased time pressure. In other words, her daily life affords a flexibility tilted toward more intensive parenting that may not support the scholarly productivity needed for her to earn tenure or advance in her field.

SCRIPTURAL REFLECTIONS

Having considered the plight of an academic mother who desires to maintain an active research agenda through the lens of the motherhood, ideal worker, and individualism norms, as well as the language of time conflict that crop up so frequently in discussions of motherhood and professional life, is it any wonder that many women decide to give up any semblance of a sustained writing life after they've had children? With few institutional resources and support, and the pervasive culture of the individualism norm that conditions us to think that striving for research is simply a matter of personal determination and effort, many academic moms can feel defeated before even starting. By pointing out these structural

⁷Slaughter actually advocates for this toward the end of her essay, as one way that women can maintain their careers and still be involved in their families.

obstacles, then, I want to recognize the felt difficulties of women like me, who desire to still participate in the knowledge production of our fields and yet feel constrained by both institutional and personal limits. Given the current discourse, it seems as if the only sensible choice is to have one child or to “back down” and resolve the psychic and emotional ramifications of that choice. These two options, however, are both unsatisfactory. Moreover, a scriptural lens and perspective can soften the presumed hard delineations between work versus family life. So in the remaining half of this essay, I ask, *How might Scripture guide us away from the paradigm of time conflict and competition?* Does Scripture offer a counternarrative to the imagery of tension, conflict, and fracture often invoked in essays on how to manage both motherhood and career?

When I read the Scriptures, several passages stand out regarding how the Bible represents time. Here are some of my general observations. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a starting point for conversation and reflection.

God’s time is not like our time. In 2 Peter 3:8, it says, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” God is outside of time because he created it. In the Genesis account of the creation of the world, the creation of time—the separation of night and day—occurs on the first day. In those early chapters of Genesis, God creates the physical principles of nature that will govern our world, including time. Yet God is not bound by those same principles. As 2 Peter reminds us, God is not only *not* bound by time, his way of measuring time is vastly different than ours. We, however, since we exist *in* time, are bound by its rules. We must abide by a twenty-four-hour day, by day and night, by seasonal change, and so on.

Our time is finite, both in a daily sense and in terms of our earthly existence. First Peter 1:24-25 reminds us:

All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Unlike God, our time on earth is limited, which is why we must steward our time well. As Psalm 90:12 admonishes us, we should “number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Knowing that our time is finite explains why academic mothers feel so torn over how to apportion their time between work that is personally and professionally significant and our children, who are equally significant and important. While God is outside of time and the creator of it, we must reckon with our physical limits (we need rest, we need breaks) and the truth that our time on earth has an expiration date.

We reap what we sow. Galatians 6:7 tells us, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” This verse reminds us about how we spend our time. Just as our research productivity will languish if we do not invest time in it, so our children need our tending and care to help them establish character and values. This verse reminds us that things don’t happen without intentionality. Yet our rate of reaping does not always correlate with how much we have invested. That is to say, there isn’t a direct line between how much we sow and *when* or *how much* we reap. It is possible to sow for many years without reaping much at all. Or sometimes this may involve sowing in other activities for a time so that you can reap the benefit of additional time toward another endeavor. For example, for a new academic mom, it may be wise to sow additional time and effort into teaching in the earlier years so that you can reap the benefits of having sustained increased margin to pursue research later. At the same time, for the academic mother, this is also an encouragement that even a little sowing into your research, even during times that require more intense parenting, will eventually yield some fruit. But if we do not sow at all, we cannot reap.

Our lives comprise several seasons. The third chapter of Ecclesiastes famously begins with, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The chapter goes on to delineate many of these activities, including “a time to plant and a time to uproot” (Ecclesiastes 3:2) and “a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing”

(Ecclesiastes 3:5). This notion of seasons in our lives, where some activities take greater priority than others, also resonates with Jesus' parable of the talents. In this parable, a master gives his three servants varying talents—one talent, two talents, and five talents—and asks them to do something with them while he is gone. The first two servants double the initial amount of talents they received while the last servant, who was only given one talent, buries his. Commentators have often interpreted this parable as one pointing to how we should invest the resources and talents given to us and that each person is given varying capacities. I think we can also see this parable as indicating the varying amounts of resources and capacities appointed at various *seasons* of our lives: sometimes it is one talent, sometimes it is two, and other times it is five. Yet we can't assume how much we are given and *when* those seasons might occur. The key idea in the parable is the notion of faithfulness toward what has been given.

How can these Scriptures redirect the academic mother who is struggling to maintain both her research ambitions and stay present with her family? The first two observations remind me of our position and posture toward God: one of frailty, humility, and dependency on an almighty Father. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us that we can come before "God's throne of grace with confidence," expecting to receive his mercy and grace in our time of need.⁸ As a mother and academic, these verses promise me that even though *I* may be bound by a twenty-four-hour day, limited by my physical weaknesses, I have access to a God who is not similarly limited. Rather, we have access to a God who has infinite wisdom and resources at hand, who created those boundaries in the first place. It means we can ask him how to navigate those boundaries and how to apportion time to each pressing task. It means asking God how to "divvy up our loves," knowing that it is not an exact formula but may look different every single day.

Furthermore, it also means having the confidence to ask God to *multiply* our time and efforts, depending on the available time we have each day.

⁸Hebrews 4:15-16 is, in its entirety, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Some days may only permit thirty minutes or less for research and writing because of family needs or teaching demands. Some days are filled with meetings, student emails, and—a frequent concern for those with young children—child illness. I have learned that in those times of lack, when I feel most acutely the time conflict between work and family, that I can come before God and ask him to expand the effectiveness of those meager ten or fifteen minutes at hand. I may be limited by only twenty-four hours in a day, but God is not. I have experienced this grace (and what a grace it is!) many times, especially during my pre-tenure days. Sometimes a mere fifteen minutes of free writing produced the seed of my chapter's entire line of argument. At other times, a brief ten minutes helped me untangle an especially dense and tricky paragraph. At another time, I spent five minutes chasing down a citation that ended up being an especially important source for my work. I learned that time, in God's spiritual economy, similar to material and spiritual resources, is not simply linear and cumulative; rather, if we invite God into how we apportion our time, it can expand beyond those initial moments. Time, in other words, can multiply. I am reminded of Jesus feeding the five thousand in the Gospels. The young boy who approached Jesus only had five loaves and two fish, yet he willingly and humbly offered it to Jesus to do what he could with them. Jesus multiplied that initial small gift tenfold many times over. While we must steward our time carefully and diligently, we don't need to see it only in physical terms. Rather, there is a spiritual dimension as well, reminding us of the One we depend and rely on daily.

The idea of stewarding our time leads me to the second set of scriptural observations above—concerning sowing and reaping and seasons in our lives. These verses point us toward seeing our family and our ambitions as two separate priorities that both require our attention but at varying rates depending on our daily and seasonal contexts. Some days require more time spent on one over the other. This daily fluctuation necessitates flexibility in our thinking and in our daily rhythms. It should actually prompt us to seek more eagerly the presence of God for guiding us in discerning how to apportion our time. I have found that I cannot write in a hurry, just

like I cannot love or teach in a hurry. If I am overwhelmed by the weight of all that is to be done, even if I have two hours to write, much of that time is squandered by worry. I have learned that in order to have an unhurried spirit, whether in writing or in being present with my children, I need to sow abundantly in God's presence and his Word in order to reap peace, stillness, and focus for the tasks at hand.

This soul work, I would argue, is just as important, if not more, as the mental work needed for our research. Slowing down and attending to our inner world makes us more aware of the deeper layers within us, the parts of our inner lives that are perhaps often repressed by busyness. I have found that attending to these feelings and bringing them before the Lord actually frees me to pursue my work with less distraction and anxiety. For example, how often have you spent close to thirty minutes of a writing session just trying to settle down in your spirit so you can actually begin writing? While this continues to be a struggle for me, I have also realized that this kind of restlessness is usually a sign that I need to address a deeper spiritual layer within me. Recently I was feeling very anxious and fretful over a conference paper that I needed to finish in a few weeks. Every time I tried to work on it, I found myself dawdling or feeling apprehensive. My initial thought was *I am feeling anxious because I don't have enough time to work on this*. School had just started for my kids, which also meant there had been a spate of minimum days and teacher service days. I started getting irritated with my husband, resenting him for not sharing equally in covering these non-school days. Yet as I probed further into why I was feeling so anxious, I realized that a large part of my resistance to writing this paper was based in feeling insecure about my topic and fearing others' judgment of my ideas. I was worried about their approval, which prevented me from even beginning. Once I realized this fear, I could bring it before the Lord directly. Rather than simply praying, "Lord, help me finish this paper," or, "Lord, free up more time for me to work on this," I could pray more specifically into this area of fear and insecurity: "Lord, release me from the fear of others' approval and judgment in writing this paper. Give me courage to express my ideas without worrying whether they sound silly

or in line with what X has written.” This second prayer gets at the reasons *why* it was difficult for me to complete the paper rather than just asking it to be done. It forced me into a greater awareness of my heart.

AUTHENTICITY AND WHOLENESS

I conclude with this exhortation toward greater soul care and spiritual awareness because I truly believe that this aspect—the spiritual—is key for the Christian academic mother who desires to pursue scholarly ambition and family life. So much of this work involves managing the fears and anxieties that can hinder our writing *and* our parenting. We can easily succumb to the motherhood, ideal worker, and individualism norms described above and feel stressed, divided, and worn out. Yet I think the beauty of both research and parenting is that both are long-term endeavors requiring patience and endurance. Both are also intensive, “all-in” activities. If we are willing, both the pursuit of scholarly ambition and parenting can compel us to strip the layers covering our hidden selves, revealing the vulnerable parts of our inner world that need God’s light, and thus point to greater intimacy with Jesus. Both, therefore, are apt vehicles for *spiritual formation*. Through my felt conflict between the pursuit of research and being more present with my family, God has formed my heart and challenged my selfhood in ways that I did not expect. Scripture’s counter-narrative to the paradigm of time conflict and competition, I would argue, is the *opposite* of self-division: it is one that, paradoxically, leads to greater self-wholeness through the recognition of our limits, propelling us toward greater dependency on and trust in God. This trust manifests in releasing our research “to-do” lists, plans, and eventual outcomes for the day (and even in the future), as James 4:13-16 so wisely reminds us.⁹ Learning to give our desires and plans—for our professional accomplishments, for our

⁹James 4:13-16 (NLT):

Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil. Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

children's growth and well-being—over to the Lord daily asks us to be present with our inner lives in a way that is at once freeing and terrifying. That kind of authenticity ultimately yields more wholeness.

So instead of time conflict and fracture, of “divvying up love,” which can still *feel* all too true, I submit instead the idea of being honest about our ambitions, desires, and needs—that we want to participate fully in both our intellectual pursuits *and* our children's lives. We begin by acknowledging who we are—scholars and mothers—and we embrace both fully, believing that both identities can coexist in God's spiritual economy. Moreover, we grant that the struggle to realize this coexistence is a special gift for the Christian academic mother, an invitation to question and work out our received narratives and beliefs about our identities as women. As we invite God into the hidden, vulnerable places of our being through our work and parenting, we discover the encompassing love of the Father. We experience his love in a deeper way because we are more honest with him and ourselves, and thus we are transformed by these encounters. Rather than seeing our ambition and our families as mutually exclusive, we can instead see them as both part of our calling to worship God with our whole lives and whole selves, as Colossians 3:17 so aptly encourages us: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

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