

“Our creative lives are a dance—fluid and ever changing—rather than one stationary, perfect balance of family and faith. For years I thought creativity was limited to those onstage or at an easel, but a new day has dawned. *Life Creative* has painted an all-inclusive picture, inviting everyone to embrace their part in this present Renaissance.”

—**Sarah Bragg**, podcaster at [SurvivingSarah.com](http://SurvivingSarah.com)

“Wendy and Kelli have told a beautiful and life-giving story, by telling the stories of many women—just like us—desiring to live the life creative and steward what they’ve been given. This book will make you aggressively grateful for the generation of women you’ve been born into, and it will read like a breath of fresh air, a reminder to run in the creative giftings you’ve been given.”

—**Jess Connolly**, author and speaker

“Kelli and Wendy understand that, yes, being a mom is about raising your children. But it’s also about fully being the woman God created you to be and expressing His love like only you can. Their words will support, encourage, and cheer you on in the art and adventure of mothering.”

—**Holley Gerth**, *Wall Street Journal* best-selling author of *You’re Already Amazing*

“Mothers carry deep within them an innate desire to create beauty around them—whether it’s with shape or color, words or song. In *Life Creative*, Wendy and Kelli come alongside the artistic soul inside us all with their wisdom and insight on how to care for our families while also caring for the artist within . . . An absolute must-read for creative moms.”

—**Denise J. Hughes**, author of *Word Writers* and *On Becoming a Writer*, editorial coordinator for (in)courage, and founder of Deeper Waters Ministry

“This is a message that wondering, hungering, hurting, hoping hearts need!”

—**Becky Keife**, blogger, speaker, and mom, [BeckyKeife.com](http://BeckyKeife.com)

“I never expected this life. When I stepped out of the workplace to minister to my boys at home, I didn’t know God would also call me to minister to mothers of boys all over the world. For years, I’ve struggled through these joint callings, simultaneously sure and unsure of myself in both. But I am sure of God, the Master Creative, who doesn’t make mistakes as He asks us to use our gifts for His glory. Is there any way to be a mom *and* be obedient to my creative calling? I believe there is, and I look to moms like Kelli and Wendy to inspire me as I figure it out. If you’re a mom struggling through multiple callings, read this book.”

—**Brooke McGlothlin**, cocreator of The MOB Society and author of *Praying for Boys: Asking God for the Things They Need Most*

“The very first thing we learn about God in His word is that He ‘created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1). We have a magnificently creative God who chose to make the pinnacle of His creation, humankind, in His image. Surely part of our image-bearing likeness to God is our ability to imagine and to create. Yet our creativity is sometimes lost in the busyness of life and mothering. In *Life Creative*, Wendy and Kelli offer fresh words of encouragement for moms to find natural, creative outlets right where they are—whether it is in a kitchen, on a canvas, through a lens, on a keyboard, or through some other medium. Wendy and Kelli’s collection of stories about real-life creative moms is particularly inspiring and has led me to thoughtfully consider how I can best reflect the image of God through my own creative interests, as well as how I can model for my children the creative life that I desire for them to pursue as they mature.”

—**Angie Mosteller**, author of *Christmas: Celebrating the Christian History of Classic Symbols, Songs and Stories*, [celebratingholidays.com](http://celebratingholidays.com)

“In a culture laden with ‘mommy guilt,’ *Life Creative* is a must-read for every mother who wants to hone her God-given creative gifts while encouraging her children to do the same. After feeling torn between mothering my three small children and pursuing my passion for writing

during the first six years of motherhood, I finally came to peace with God giving me desires and gifts to bring Him glory. Motherhood and the creative life need not be at odds with each other! Wendy and Kelli's book will help readers realize this from the get-go. New and seasoned mothers alike need to read this book."

—**Erin Odom**, creator of [thehumbledhomemaker.com](http://thehumbledhomemaker.com) and author of *More Than Just Making It*

"I am breathless. These are the things I believe but didn't have words to articulate . . . things that my soul knows are truth. I'm going back to read it all again, slowly."

—**Mindy Rogers**, teacher, writer, mom

"Never has there been a time like this for creative and artistic women to embrace the high calling of motherhood *and* the unique giftings God has given to each of us. There is indeed a movement—a Renaissance—of the creative woman, the creative mom. I'm grateful that Wendy and Kelli have chosen to encourage this generation of women, right now, to embrace their God-given creativity and steward it to the glory of God. This book is right on time."

—**Ruth Simons**, artist and writer, [GraceLaced.com](http://GraceLaced.com)

"As a mom of two wild boys and a new baby girl, I am thankful for authentic moms like Wendy and Kelli who welcome women into this creative world in a manner that breaks down all barriers of comparison and the idea of measuring up."

—**Amber Tysl**, photographer and blogger

"As the mom of three kids, I need the wisdom of other moms, but most of all I need their companionship and gentle nod of understanding. Wendy and Kelli have offered that in the pages of this book in the most precious of ways: They've taken our hands, looked us in the eyes, and given us a gentle nod to help us move forward. *Life Creative* lets me be myself and find my best mothering there. Kudos, ladies. This book is a big exhale, a dear friend, and a powerful teacher."

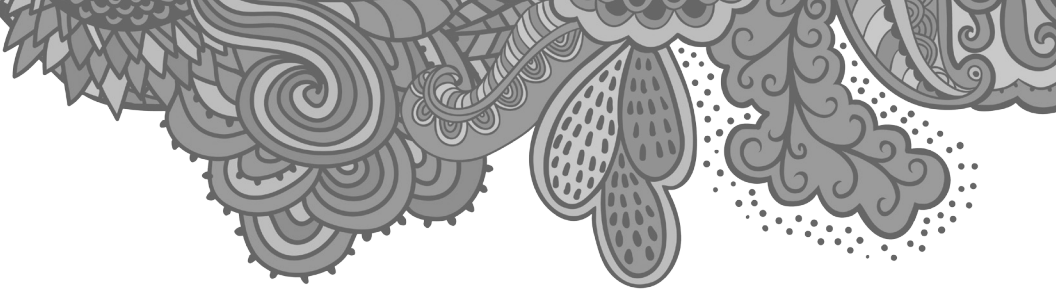
—**Lisa Whittle**, speaker, author of *{w}hole* and *I Want God*

*“Life Creative* extends a hand across the lonely miles of motherhood to every woman who feels like she’s lost herself in a sea of diapers and dishes. It breathes beauty and life and purpose into the everyday servanthood of mothering and reminds us that it’s up to us to seize those very ordinary moments and turn them into something beautiful. I have never read anything like this, and as both a mother and an artist, I endorse it fully. The world needs *Life Creative*.”

—**Emily T. Wierenga**, author of five books including the memoir *Atlas Girl*

“Few things are as disorienting as the feeling that you have lost yourself in the midst of your own life. When demands of performing as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, chef, medical aid, teacher, disciplinarian, theologian, artist, and more all pile up in even one day, it can seem nearly impossible to extract a true self from the many roles demanding your attention. A true Renaissance woman isn’t torn in a million directions but is instead able to recognize the creative ways that God works in and through the various channels of her life. In motherhood and in ministry, Wendy and Kelli are women who have felt the tension and found the beauty of God’s creativity through the changing seasons. *Life Creative* isn’t simply an inspiration to embrace the seasons but a manual to continuously celebrate the creativity of God at work in you.”

—**Logan Wolfram**, speaker and author of *Curious Faith: Rediscovering Hope in the God of Possibility*



# Life Creative

Inspiration for Today's  
Renaissance Mom

WENDY SPEAKE & KELLI STUART

 **Kregel**  
Publications





*Life Creative: Inspiration for Today's Renaissance Mom*

© 2016 by Wendy Speake and Kelli Stuart

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews.

Distribution of digital editions of this book in any format via the Internet or any other means without the publisher's written permission or by license agreement is a violation of copyright law and is subject to substantial fines and penalties. Thank you for supporting the authors' rights by purchasing only authorized editions.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

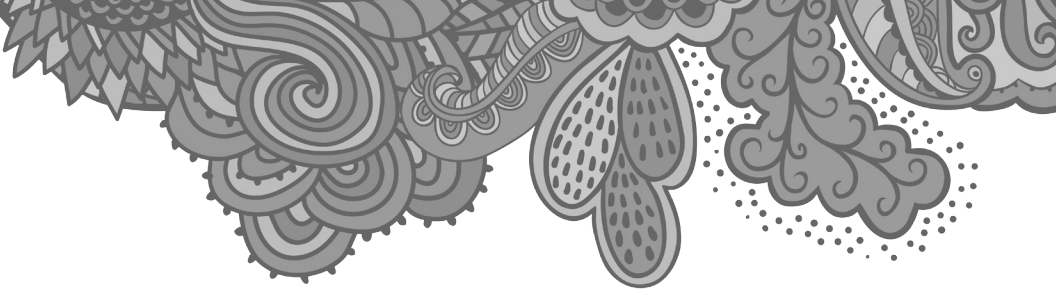
Italic in Scripture quotations has been added by the authors for emphasis.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4410-4

Printed in the United States of America

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 / 5 4 3 2 1





We dedicate this book to the Master Creative,  
the maker of heaven and earth,  
the One who wove us then wooed us,  
who stitched then saved our souls.  
This is our *Surrendered Yes*.









# CONTENTS

## *Introduction* **11**

1. A New Renaissance **15**
2. Confined Yet Unhindered **29**
3. Beyond Jerusalem **39**
4. Renaissance Faire **51**
5. Our Most Beautiful Creations **63**
6. Making Space **75**
7. Renaissance Worship **87**
8. The Art of Home **99**
9. The Pull of the Tide **113**
10. When God Calls a Mother **127**
11. A Business of Art in the Busyness of Motherhood **141**
12. Renaissance Mom in a Digital Age **155**
13. When Art Turns a Profit **167**
14. Renaissance Rising **181**
15. Doxology **193**

## *Notes* **199**

## *Acknowledgments* **203**

## *About the Authors* **205**



## INTRODUCTION

A wise woman once said to me that there are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.

Hodding Carter Jr., American Journalist

It is the high calling of motherhood to raise our children in the grounded, unspoken knowledge that they belong and are safe within our hearts and homes. Roots grow deep in the supple soil of childhood. It is within the safety of the family that children begin to learn who they are. As they toddle at our sides, tentatively at first, we begin the joy-filled process of discovering their uniquely delightful God-design—who they were made to be, and how they were made to eventually soar off into the good works God prepared for each one of them. Their gifts are like hidden treasure that we unearth together.

What an honor it is to excavate these glorious gems from the lives of our little people, whispering into velvet ears, “God did such a good job when He made you. I love the way you build with Legos; I wonder what else you’ll build with your hands when you’re grown up. Maybe houses, or playgrounds for children.” Murmuring our encouragement as we tuck them into bed, tickling soft skin.

Other times we shout it as they ascend the platform to receive that special award at school. “Most voracious reader!” we exclaim. “I wonder

what God has planned for your life. Maybe one day you'll write stories for other children. Stories that are noble and good, and that inspire kids to do great things!"

A mother's love tills the fertile soil of her children's lives so that their roots might be healthy, all the while rooting them on to sprout wings and soar. Many books have already been written to encourage mothers on this very front. Books about the roots and wings our children need to thrive, because both extremities are required for a rich, fulfilling life. And yet sometimes in the process a mom's own wonderful design can get lost for a season. It's not unusual. Nor is it the end of the world, though sometimes it feels that way. We call it *sacrifice*. We call it *motherhood*.

Back at the beginning, when this book was just a dream, I told a crafty girlfriend with three preschool-aged children about our plans to encourage creative moms. As I finished describing the basic premise, my tenderhearted, creative friend grabbed my hand and thanked me.

A mother's natural bent toward creativity doesn't just wither and die with the birth of a child. This core component remains part of her intricate design.

I was surprised to see tears pool in her eyes. "No one's ever spoken to that part of me before," she whispered.

She went on to tell me about the day she announced her second pregnancy to a group of close friends. Upon hearing her delightful news, one of them quipped, "It's time to put away your sewing machine. You won't be doing that for a while." The natural assumption was that children would now sup-

persede all other desires. Her time would be too consumed, after all, to even consider her own creative pursuits.

There's truth there, we all feel it, but it's also true that a mother's natural bent toward creativity doesn't just wither and die with the birth of a child. This core component remains part of her intricate design.

Dear friends, I've got some good news to share: every mom was

created creative. Each and every one of us has been endowed with the Creator's ability to imagine something out of nothing. We call this inspiration, and isn't that how the universe came to be? His creation first imagined and then executed. From nothing He made every atom, every molecule. And we were fashioned to live, move, and breathe in the fullness of His creative likeness!

Here in this present season, however, our creativity may look different than before. Some inventive moms create meals for their toddlers where veggies are ingeniously blended into sauces and muffins, while others are able to grow their creative passions into successful home businesses. Many cautiously fit their interests into everyday life like a private hobby, scrapbooking their way through their children's growing-up years. The more roots-centric moms find joy in creating gorgeous parties for the benefit of close family and friends, while others long constantly to spread their wings and fly on the wind of inspiration.

And so this book is for all moms: those who consider themselves artistic and those who suddenly and surprisingly find themselves inspired in the midst of these mothering years. All are invited to celebrate and explore this *life creative*.

We are two women writing this missive of encouragement as one voice, because we want to honor your life at home and your dreams beyond and the myriad places between, and one woman rarely has the vantage point to examine it all. In fact, each chapter tells the stories of many others living creatively within this blessed season of motherhood. Together we, *I*, endeavor to paint one cohesive yet diverse portrait of faith, family, and the breadth and width of a woman's creative dreams.

God has prepared for Himself one great song of praise throughout eternity, and those who enter the community of God join in this song. It is the song that the "morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy" at the creation of the world (Job 38:7).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

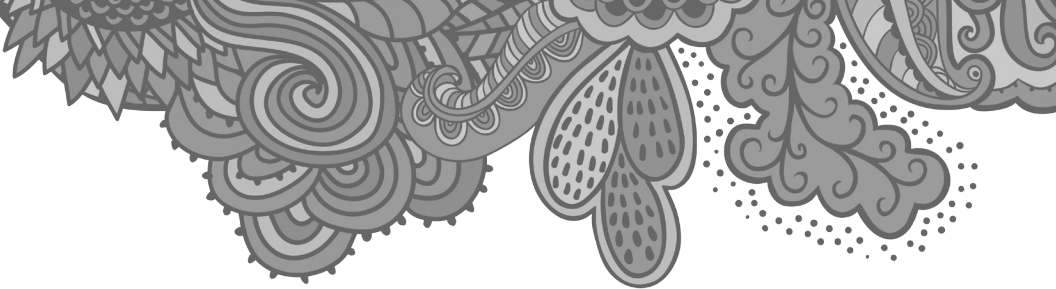
I don't know if it takes a village to raise a child, but I do believe it requires a whole lot of women to raise up a mom. Picture the book you

I don't know if it takes  
a village to raise a  
child, but I do believe  
it requires a whole lot  
of women to raise up  
a mom.

hold in your hands as an intersection where the snuffed-out fire of uniquely creative you crosses paths with an entire community of artists passionately pursuing this life in Christ. Each one gifted in various forms, but all united by our common season of active motherhood. I'm telling their stories—*your* stories—and encouraging all moms, no

matter the circumstances or season, to discover again the joy of chasing their dreams, while also remaining deeply rooted at home.

This is for them, and it's for you—uniquely designed, creative *you*.



## Chapter One

---

# A New Renaissance

People are moved to wonder by mountain peaks, by vast waves of the sea, by broad waterfalls on rivers, by the all-embracing extent of the ocean, by the revolutions of the stars. But in themselves they are uninterested.

Augustine, AD 399

See you there awkwardly turning your wrist, trying to conceal the fact that you're uploading another artfully edited picture of your children to Instagram. Does your husband laugh, and do you blush? Have you convinced yourself that what you're doing is silly? Or are you halfway holding on to hope that each picture is an offering of something beautiful and worthy and encouraging? *Because it is.* And so are you.

You are an offering altogether beautiful, worthy, and wonderful. You, dear Mom, are the poster child of a brand new Renaissance! This movement is not coursing across Europe as it did in the 1500s, or blaring from the jazz clubs of Harlem, pumping out into the humid New York skyline of the 1920s. It is, instead, flowing out of homes, nurseries,



kitchens, and living rooms around the world through cyberspace, uploaded and shared with friends and public circles, allowing this generation of Renaissance women to move faster than Michelangelo or Langston Hughes ever dreamed.

Here's the most amazing part: you're just being you—altogether beautiful you, amidst the chaotic rhythms of motherhood. Capturing

I'm here to tell you  
this is a worthy use  
of your life: both  
the grand offering  
of motherhood, and  
the smaller gifting of  
artistic self-expression.

great glimpses of glory with your camera at the sandlot over brown bag lunches. And when you lay your little ones down for naps, out it flows—the inspired offering of a creative woman.

I'm here to tell you this is a worthy use of your life: both the grand offering of motherhood, and the smaller gifting of artistic self-expression. I hear you and see you, and am experiencing you

as you pin your way through new recipes and craft ideas. As you redesign your child's room and paint her walls with murals, I stand in awe of your outpouring. This is the flow of a Renaissance mom.

Of course, it's not easy, is it? This glorious Renaissance most often happens in the quiet moments, many of them hidden in the dark of night after children are asleep, or early mornings before tiny feet pitter-patter to your side. You're sneaking it in, because life dictates that you do so. But I see you as you work.

I see the artistry eeking out of those slivers of silent moments . . . stolen, sequestered, and sanctified. I've taken the time to consider the way you work dough, the way you fly that needle through fabric, plan a birthday party with handcrafted banners, and type out the poetry of your days into short blog posts. And I invite you to join me in this observation, to consider the way you were created *creative*. I offer this invitation with a warning, though. It's not uncommon for women to experience shame and embarrassment when they pause to focus on themselves, particularly when they are in the thick of this others-centered season. This book is a safe place where we seek out



together what God might have intended when, just days after He hung the heavens and fixed the Earth in place, He fashioned us in His image—creative.

Some of you are stay-at-home moms, each day carving out those rare moments that you get to call your own. This book is for you, a love letter to your creative heart. Others of you are on-the-job moms, fitting your creativity into the packed places of work-life balance. Either way, consider me your cheerleader, shaking my pom-poms and shouting 2-4-6-8, because I appreciate you! And so do your children as you decorate their lives and keepsake their memories. Your husband, coworkers, and friends are grateful for the gift of your creativity and the marvelous meals served on the tablecloth of your hospitality.

You are the face of a brand-new Renaissance. Look in the mirror and take a deep breath, knowing you have been affirmed.

But let us also acknowledge that it's a dance, this creative life in the midst of mothering—a dance that threatens our balance. You understand balance as you hang your canvas upon the wall. You choose balance as you create a website to market your treasures, and balance again as you purposefully shut down your computer when it's time to join your family around the table. And in all the understanding and the choosing, you may just find that there is no such thing as balance after all. Some days it's all mothering, and other days you're lopsided the other way. Like dancing on a tightrope as it sways in the wind, one foot in front of the other, each creative step and mothering step, back and forth.

So read on, dear Renaissance Moms, not just to receive affirmation, but also to find encouragement and help in this dance between family, faith, and flourishing creativity.



**Renaissance man** (*noun*). A cultured man who is knowledgeable, educated, interested, and/or proficient in a wide range of subjects.

A Renaissance man or woman, or *mom* as the case may be, is a term reserved for one who is generally known to be talented in many different areas. “She bakes, she sews, she sings . . . what a Renaissance woman!” Though most Renaissance men of the late Middle Ages were artistically gifted, the term was not relegated to the arts alone, but rather included a wide skill set. Leonardo DaVinci, for example, was a master painter and sculptor, but also studied the stars and charted the anatomy of man. DaVinci was both artist and scientist, a man who could seemingly do it all. And so can we, perhaps, but not all at once. And not all today.



During our college days, Jules smelled of citrus and cinnamon when everyone else smelled of Dr. Pepper and granola. She was altogether different and intriguing because she dared live off campus and make her own meals rather than join us in the cafeteria.

Jules was a poet, an actress, a dancer, and, I thought at the time, quite possibly a fairy.

She no longer performs onstage, but this doesn't mean her creative life has been lost. It's morphed out of the theater and into the home instead. Yet through the passage of time, one thing remains consistent—she still smells of exotic spices. These days, however, instead of keeping to herself in a small off-campus bungalow, Jules has swung open the doors of her family home in Los Angeles, feeding women from her kitchen with healthy meals and rich conversation. Her passion to blend art and life within her own four walls over a wooden cutting board has overflowed into lives the world over.

Knee deep in mothering, Jules creatively inspires women not only to feed their families healthy, beautiful meals but to nourish their own souls as well. Encouraging weary moms who have lost their passion for the kitchen to rediscover the joy, the art, and the honor of filling little bellies and hearts alike. Jules models this joy with recipes that read more like a conversation over a platter of persimmons, figs, and all sorts of vegetables straight from the earth. Blogging her way

through farmers' markets as her children pull their wagon behind her, it's all swathed together into one inspiring picture of a Renaissance mom.

It was another Jules who helped coin the phrase *Renaissance* in literature. Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France*, in 1855, was one of the first to fashion a label upon the miracle of creativity that pushed through Europe from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries. Art was being born again after the dark ages of European history.

### The Dark Ages

*Renaissance* literally translates “rebirth.” How appropriate, and how inspiring for mothers of young children, because there are indeed dark ages in our mothering as well. Dark years when long nights and overwhelming days roll ceaselessly together, and hormones swing out. Then suddenly our tears are tempered by the glory moments of beauty. Soft morning cuddles. Childlike faith taking root. The handprint art we frame, and the birthday dress that magically turns her into a real-life princess.

In these dark ages, amidst the unending flow of meeting everyone's needs, the arts seem to get lost for a season, as they did in the darkest chapters of world history. But here's an amazing truth about the literal Dark Ages and the Renaissance that followed: it was the church that protected much of the ancient writings when the world went black. It was the church that tucked them away alongside relics and artifacts. As though God Himself were holding the arts there in the dark. And when it was time for our world's creative rebirth, much of it flowed from the church.

Now implant that in your own heart on a personal level. In your darkest mothering days, when the hours stretch long and weary, and your time and energy leak out upon the never-ending list of chores, God Himself is holding on to those creative and seemingly lost parts of you. And when He Himself calls you to new life on the other side of this overwhelming season, He will give it all back—along with so much more.

If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,  
And the light around me will be night,”  
Even the darkness is not dark to You,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike to You. (Ps. 139:11–12)

Our darkest days are as light to Him. He sees us all illuminated, from beginning to end. He knows all, is over all, purposing each dark day to radically juxtapose the glory of the Renaissance to come. For God is the master of rebirth, reigning sovereign over the dark ages of our personal history. Yes, God is the author of this Renaissance!



I understand all of this well, the death and dying sensation of servitude. Even back when I prepared to say “I do,” a small part of me cried out “I don’t,” because I could foresee the natural flow away from me and into them on the other side of marriage and children.

There we were in the pastor’s office, young, naïve, and love-struck, counseling our way through the engagement as we planned the wedding. Thankfully, the pastor didn’t just want a well-planned wedding for us. He saw ahead into our marriage and somehow perceived my fears, so he turned to me and asked, “What are you most afraid of?” I sputtered, stuttered, and stopped.

He let me think in the awkward quiet, and it grew hot as my future husband waited for an answer. Finally, “I’m afraid of losing myself” came from somewhere deeper than my conscious mind—a prophetic deep. And our counselor nodded and smiled, and waited for me to continue.

“Not right away, maybe, but over the years. Because I love this man, and want to pour myself out for him and into him; and one day I want to stay at home with our children, and pour myself out for them . . . but what if I get all poured out and lose the stuff that makes me special? I don’t even know what it might look like. But what if I do?”

He nodded again then shifted his gaze to my fiancé, to the one who had not yet done any wrong in my eyes. The older said to the younger, “Do you hear what she’s saying? She’s going to lay her life down to lift you up. But this is only going to work if you do the same for her.” It was intense, with my man nodding emphatically like he understood, but neither of us really did because we hadn’t lived it yet.

Now here we are fifteen years in, and while he’s tried to lift me up and serve me back, it’s not a simple equation where  $y = x$ , because his  $y$  chromosome doesn’t always equal my  $x$ . So here I am, giving myself away for all these people that I’m head over heels in love with, and he’s off working, laying his life down for us in a whole other sense, and all that good counseling has to find its way to application. So we try to figure it out late at night, once the children are in bed, and we meet up together in the dark.

But when he falls asleep, I’m still awake, and I see that my premarried fears were rooted in something real and common among women. Perhaps you also see yourself struggling in this lonely place, having laid it all down for the loved ones in your midst. Perhaps you too know these dark ages of mothering, where passion for life, ministry, and art seem lost.

If that’s where you are, dear Mom, I urge you not to mourn the loss for more than a moment. This is not the end of who you are. As you pour yourself out to your beloveds, day after day, longing for time to create but not knowing where the moments will magically appear, I urge you to cling to the picture of Him holding your art with the same tenderness that He holds your eternal soul. Caressing each moment protectively in His palm, guarding it as you sacrificially give of yourself.

These dark ages are not the end of who He created you to be. They’re the night before the dawn, the winter before spring, the labor before new life. Like the flip side of an Ecclesiastes coin, a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to rend and a time to mend; a time to pour into young souls, cultivating their roots, and a time to send them out with their own strong wings; a time to know death but also a time to know rebirth. Renaissance. This is our anthem song as we march through the

dark: a time to lay our lives down, but also a time to be lifted up again. Look up expectantly—this is only the beginning!

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. (Eccl. 3:1)

His plans are for seasons and each season requires new plans. When our children are very young we inevitably find ourselves in a season of sacrifice. This sacrifice will look different for each of us. Some will sacrifice artistic careers to stay home with the children, filling the days with fantastic adventures, hectic trips to the grocery store, and more laundry than can possibly be tallied. Others may have to sacrifice time in the home *along with* creative expression in order to help make ends meet financially, dropping children off at day care, praying through traffic, wishing it were easier.

Make no mistake about it—sacrifice is never easy. I say this not as someone far removed from sacrificial loving but as someone presently living deep in the trenches. The monitor by my side hums with the white noise of a fan as I type this message out, reminding me of the newborn who's swaddled like an inchworm one room over. I know I should sleep myself, sinking into a few hours of slumber before her cries draw me to her side again. But this message calls, and so I sacrifice the sleep. Yes, I understand the hollow places of sacrifice, and I agree. It is difficult.

But then, if it weren't difficult, it wouldn't be a sacrifice.

Perhaps you're in the midst of a similarly constraining season of sacrifice. But these early mothering days do not define the length and width of your forever life. It is true that He made you a wife and a mother, but your timeline holds more from cradle to graduation to grave. More seasons and more facets to the jewel we call your abundant life. And part of your *more* is the fact that He created you creative.

Because of that masterful design, you ache today to live in the fullness

of your nature: to sing or to write, to paint, to decorate, to sew, to build, or to bake. You have ideas, some of which keep you awake at night. You feel them calling and long to answer, but you're not sure how. You roll over to find your husband sleeping soundly in the dark, and perhaps feel a bit resentful. He knows his purpose; you wish that you could embrace your mission with the same gutsy pride.

Here's the charge: I believe you can. Though some days (or seasons) it's an awkward, bumpy ride, the creative in you is still there, in the dark perhaps, waiting for that coming time when you'll once again stretch your creative wings, and—yes, my friend—you just may fly.

This Renaissance is  
the breeze to give you  
flight, but it all starts  
with the One who  
gave you wings.

There is freedom waiting for you,  
On the breezes of the sky,  
And you ask, "What if I fall?"  
Oh but my darling,  
What if you fly?

Erin Hanson

This Renaissance is the breeze to give you flight, but it all starts with the One who gave you wings. Rest fully in the knowledge that your creativity was not an accident, nor is your present circumstance of motherhood. They are both gifts from Him, both parts of a Master plan, woven and knit into beautiful you. God has a plan for your creativity, even in the seemingly dormant years—the dark ages before the dawning light.



When I think back to that day in our pastor's office, I'm moved by my prophetic fears. However, I believe that our counselor, though well

intentioned, didn't get it quite right. While he encouraged my husband to support me, I've found that I can't depend on him to fill me and hold me up all the time. I need more—something more, *Someone* more.

During the hardest and darkest seasons of sacrifice, the only one able to lift us *fully* from the dark and give us renewed vision for life is our Savior. His Spirit and His life and His power holding us up as we lay it all down.

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;  
Many will see and fear  
And will trust in the LORD. (Ps. 40:3)

So you singers reading now, this figurative new song of praise is coming your way—and maybe a literal one too. For the visual artists and the wordsmiths, the seamstresses and cooks, and you decorators in our midst, a new song is prepared for you as well. Each melody tailored to your specific gift, to fit your life, your loved ones, and your expanding dreams. And no matter how it flows, selling your jewelry or painting canvases, designing websites or taking family portraits, or out to the world through the tender vibrato of your shaking voice, God has a purpose for each note!

This Renaissance song is kingdom work.



For many years as a young mother, I clung to the light of John 15:13, chiseling my own translation into each new day: “Greater love has *no mom* than this, that she lay down her life for her family.” I clung to these words during days when I longed for more but could not find the time or energy to fit anything else in. In the midst of it all, I felt great shame for my lack of contentment. I pushed on sacrificially, offering this mantra up to the Lord each morning as I placed my bare feet square on the ground of the new day.

Then one morning as my toes touched the cool wood floor and my



mothering verse rolled off my tongue, I felt a pause in my soul. After many long years of persevering in sacrificial love, God's whisper came softly but firmly, "Yes, it's true I'm calling you to sacrifice, but I don't actually want you to die." It was then I saw myself walking around our home as a ghost of the woman God created me to be. His sweet words displaced my premature death, breathing new life into my heart and my home, resurrecting long-buried parts.

My goal now is to breathe this whisper into your heart: to inspire you in the chapters ahead to anticipate His lifting hands, to embrace this rebirth, this *Renaissance*, by embracing fearfully and wonderfully made, creative you.

Do you see now, dear sister, that He doesn't actually want you to die in these mothering years? He was so purposeful in our creative design! This is you and me, and a whole army of moms, gathering around these pages, redefining what a laid-down woman looks like. Could it be that God's will for us isn't that we lay down our passions and our lives on the altar to be burned, but that we lay them instead at the feet of our Savior to be used? A living sacrifice.

In His time. For His glory.

## Wonderfully Made

They came out of the pool a tangle of wet limbs. Wet suits were thrown over the backs of chairs, and I lifted the youngest up into a warm, sun-drenched towel, hugging him briefly until he squirmed from my grasp and followed the others into the house.

Sweet, quiet moments of solitude are starting to come more frequently as the children grow up and into their independence. And as they transition, I do too, which is why one of my present goals is to sit down and simply be still at least once a day. Not folding clothes, or

Could it be that God's  
will for us isn't that we  
lay down our passions  
and our lives on the  
altar to be burned,  
but that we lay them  
instead at the feet of  
our Savior to be used?  
A living sacrifice.

even reading stories aloud to my kiddos on the couch, but the *ceasing from striving* sort of stillness that takes discipline. And so I sat back down and breathed in deeply the dry earth smells around our home.

It took only a moment for me to hear birds chirping various melodies; so many different types, each singing its joyful hymn from the branches above my head. And the songs floated up, unhindered and free. Layered into the sound track of creation was the rustling of dried leaves as lizards darted in the foliage nearby. A barely audible tinkling played from the eucalyptus branches beside the house. Two dogs barked, a horse whinnied, and the sound of my children's laughter floated out from the sliding glass door still slightly ajar.

What a glorious song, this life that surrounds me, teeming with creativity all its own. Back before children, I often stood in awe of God's creative handiwork throughout nature. Everything seemed to testify to *Elohim*, Creator God.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;  
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Ps. 19:1)

Then when my children were born, my understanding of God as creator was taken to a whole new level. How purposefully He wove each one together with their personalities and skin tones and eye colors and the varying pitches in their laughter!

For You formed my inward parts;  
You wove me in my mother's womb.  
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully  
made;  
Wonderful are Your works,  
And my soul knows it very well. (Ps. 139:13–14)

I can't help but praise Him for His handiwork on display in their little lives. And since each miracle birth I have watched eagerly and expectantly, believing every day of their precious lives was planned before one

of them came to be. And yet, only since the miracle *rebirth* of my own life have I been able to see that these psalms were written also about me. God created *me*. He knit *me* together in my mother's womb. All His works are wonderful, I know that full well, but only recently have I embraced the fact that *I* am one of His wonderful works.

And so are you.