

The **Passionate**

MOM

Dare to Parent in Today's World

SUSAN MERRILL



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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For Megan, Emily, Hannah, Mark, and Grant—
you are my favorite open door.
I love you.

See, I have placed before you an open door that no
one can shut.

I know that you have little strength,
yet you have kept my word and have not denied my
name.

—Revelations 3:8





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3

Passion

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept.

—Nehemiah 1:4

Have you ever found yourself sitting at your kitchen table, head in hands, tears streaming, shoulders heaving, heart breaking with grief and concern over a child? Please tell me I am not the only one!

Nehemiah heard the distressing news about his people's safety, and he sank into a chair and wept. He had *passion*, and it was so great that the emotion overwhelmed and consumed him for days. In fact, his passion drove the rest of his story. It was the fuel that kept him focused on the task for which God had exclusively designed him.

I think moms are more like Nehemiah in their passion than in anything else. Nehemiah passionately loved his people. Moms passionately love their children. Passion made Nehemiah a bold and courageous leader for Israel. Passion will make you a bold and courageous mom for your children.



Nehemiah had a passion that drove him to action. You must be so passionate about your child that it moves you to tears and drives you to action. Passion may be the third brick in your wall, but it is a foundational one, and all the other bricks rest upon it. Passion is a strong and compelling emotion that will motivate you to dare to parent in today's world.

Brick #3

Passion

A Passionate Mom must be passionate about her child.

Passion is powerful, and moms by nature are passionate about their children. I will never forget the first time I felt invaded by a passion from some place deep within that left the rational side of me questioning who I had become. My first child, Megan, was only four months old, so my hormones were still on the skittish side. We were taking our first trip to visit family, just she and I. I had gracefully navigated airport security *with* all the baby paraphernalia and *without* a peep from my well-behaved newborn. I was feeling so competent, and I settled rather smugly into my seat with little precious, thinking, *I can do this; what is the big deal?*

We taxied to the runway. The engines began to roar. My seat began to shake. Then the plane lurched forward and began to race down the runway with increasing speed. My heart lurched right with it and took off before the plane did. I was startled and confused. I felt as if the revving engine had somehow connected to my heart. The noise and speed escalated, and so did the sound and pace of my heart beating. My

mind was not my own, and every nerve I had was screaming,
YOU CANNOT PROTECT YOUR BABY ON THIS PLANE—GET OFF NOW!

Just when you think you have it together as a mom, you realize you don't.

Well, the alien that invaded has never left me. Thankfully, my hormones have calmed down a bit, but that passion to protect, fight for, nurture, and love my children is always there. For better or worse. And when my children are in trouble, my passion pours out in tears—just as it did for Nehemiah.

THE INTENSE AND INFINITE PASSION OF A MOM

As women, we can have some really unexplainable teary moments. My husband, Mark, loves to laugh when he tells the story of the first time I cried in our marriage. We were still in our first year, only nine months into our marriage, but I was already six months pregnant. Mark came home from work to find me in a puddle of tears, sobbing hysterically. To his credit, his first reaction was concern that something might have happened to the baby. My response to his concern was to sob irrationally and say without any explanation as to why, “I just wish it were Christmas!” It made perfect sense to me. Christmas was my favorite time of the year, and if it were only Christmas, I would be within weeks of finishing work and delivering the baby. Whatever concern he had during that first teary moment of our marriage evaporated into amusement.

As skeptical as a lot of men may be about the validity of women's emotions, I believe that God created us to be creatures



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of intense and infinite passion. It is that passion that drives us to instinctively desire to protect and provide for our children. Our passion is what makes each of us that intense mama bear we've all seen standing on her hind legs and pawing the air. Think about it. When and why do you cry for your children? Do you have a child with a lifelong medical condition? I do, and I have cried watching her physically fight just to feel well. Do you have a child who has been left out or socially hurt by others? I do, and I have cried with her in her humiliation and anger. Do you have a child who didn't make a team, didn't get a part in a play, or just worked really hard for something he or she didn't get? I did on all three counts, and my heart was more broken with disappointment than theirs. Do you have a child making unwise, rebellious choices with scary consequences? I did, and my gut ached with fear while my eyes dripped with tears.

But our passion also makes our love infinite. Recently, my sister-in-law Karen's mother became really ill and had to spend some time in an assisted-living facility for rehabilitation. Karen flew home to visit her mom and assess her care. As she spent the next few days at the facility in observation, she noticed two other patients in particular. They were physically able and were often out and about the facility, so my sister-in-law soon came to recognize them. They also had another distinguishing factor: they both carried baby dolls. Karen is very tenderhearted, and it really touched her to see these elderly women caring for their baby dolls.

She mentioned this to one of the nurses and asked why the two women carried dolls. The nurse told her that both of them had lost some mental capacity. Neither one could remember much of their lives or their children's lives. But instinctively,



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they still yearned for the children they didn't know and were greatly comforted when in possession of their baby dolls. Is that amazing? The memory of their children was gone, but the passion for them was still there. And it must have been an intense passion because they became distraught if they didn't have their "babies." The passion to protect and nurture was still intact. The mind forgets, but the heart always protects, always perseveres. Love never fails; it is infinite. These aged mothers couldn't remember what they loved, but they still loved passionately.

A mother's love is passionate—intense and infinite—from beginning to end!

Nehemiah's story is filled with the same passion. We see it in the very beginning of his book, where he wrote that he sat down and wept at the news of his people. We will see it all the way through to the end of his story. His passion never failed because it was fueled by love. Nehemiah loved his God and loved his people, and he would do anything for them—he would protect them by building the wall; he would trust God; and he would persevere to completion.

Love never fails, and Nehemiah was not going to fail because his passion was firmly rooted in his love. Mixing love into our mortar is an easy one because it is so natural for a mom, and love will help us keep that brick of passion in place.

First Corinthians 13 says, "Love is patient, love is kind. . . . It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." Indeed, love *is* unfailing, and that quality can make it painful. When we love deeply, it is painful to watch our children make mistakes or suffer.

Love: strong affection and tender concern for another



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I recently discovered a rebellious streak in one of our children. It came as a painful surprise to my husband and me. It was also a strong source of discouragement to me as I was writing this book on parenting. I really struggled with this verse about love too.

Love always protects, but it is a struggle to protect a child when he or she makes unwise choices.

Love always trusts, but it is a struggle to trust that God has a plan for a disobedient child and that he is in total control of the details of the plan, no matter how scary it looks.

Love always hopes, but it is a struggle to hope that a child will have a future that looks very different from the present—a future relationship restored to the sweetness that it was in the past.

Love always perseveres, but it is a struggle every single day to persevere without being overcome by fear and sorrow.

Love never fails. Is that a promise? I want to believe, but I get scared that I will fail.

Love hurts, but love also hopes. As moms, we must love intensely and infinitely, persevering in hope that our love will not fail.

Confession

I am not a very good passionate mom. My trust is weak and easily gives way to fear, and I deeply fear that I will fail as a mom. As Nehemiah cried over his people, I passionately cry over my children. But that is where my likeness to Nehemiah ends. I haven't mastered the trust and hope. I have the passion and

tears, but I am caving to the fear instead of persevering in the hope. And the worst of it is that my fear paralyzes me and I get confused about what actions to take in times of need.

It is so easy to talk about something—it is so hard to take action. But that is exactly what Nehemiah did.

PASSION TAKES ACTION

Nehemiah's people were in trouble, and it is clear he felt passionately about it. There is nothing amazing in that. When our children are in trouble, we can be just as passionate. What is amazing and an inspiration to me is what Nehemiah did with his passion. He did not allow himself to be permanently overwhelmed. He did not freeze in fear. Nehemiah took initiative. He poured his passion into action—marvelously organized, calculated, purposeful action. I want that kind of passion, the kind that forces me into fearless action and results in a lifelong plan for parenting with purpose so I will produce wise, healthy, relational, and purposeful adult children.

If you know Nehemiah's story, you know his passion was about to erupt into a *whole lot* of action. It would fuel the initiative he would need to build Jerusalem's wall, to protect his people, to deflect attack, and to persevere to the end. A Mom needs the same. She needs initiative to funnel her passion into action. It is a character quality that can free a mom from panic and

Initiative:

the ability to recognize what needs to be done—and do it



fear and set her in motion to protect and provide her child with a future.

PERCEPTION AND PONDERING SPARK PASSION

I was and am passionate about protecting, nurturing, and training my children. But in one particular case, I missed an opportunity to nurture and train because I was unperceptive. It was one of my bigger perception misses.

I have a child who was always so easy, so compliant, and so adored for good behavior that it never crossed my mind that he could be anything less than perfect. At the same time that this perfect one was morphing into a teenager, I became distracted by another child we had just adopted. The new addition to the family was justifiably in need of a lot of attention, and I gave it, passionately. The other children's needs paled in comparison, and I became unperceptive of those needs. I totally missed what was going on in my quiet child, and I never gave it a thought. I forgot to ponder because I was unperceptive. I couldn't be passionate about his needs because I was unaware that there *was* a need.

Years later . . . such guilt. Such passion and tears at the kitchen table, head in hands—you get the picture. I eventually perceived what I had failed to observe. We all make mistakes; I can attest to that.

A lack of perception can be a deterrent to passion. Conversely, proficient perception can drive passion.

Take Nehemiah, for example. He obviously was passionate about his people or he wouldn't have been so upset. But

had he not been pondering them over the years, would he have even thought to ask his brother about them? If he had been distracted and not listening, would he have perceived the problem? But he did, and it drove the man's heart. It fueled a fire that expanded his capacity far beyond himself. Passion can do the same for us.

Take your passion and put it into action—after you have perceived and pondered what to take action about!

PASSION DRAINERS

I have never met a woman who gave birth devoid of passion and love for her child, although I am sure some exist. I have, however, met women who have lost a bit of that passion. I don't think they meant to lose it; it just happened along the way. Their passion was just imperceptibly drained out of them. I have sprung many a slow passion leak. I have had all kinds of great intentions of what kind of family we would be, the memories we would make, the lessons I would share, the manners I would instill, the daily dinners I would cook, the words of love and joy I would impart.

But sometimes, many times, things get in the way; stuff happens; life's trials can get us off track. Then that happy, iridescent bubble pops, and we become overwhelmed and discouraged. Many moms feel like failures; they only see the parts of life that got away from them—the things they didn't do instead of all the things they did do, their parenting triumphs. I have often felt like a failure. And that discouragement can plummet a mom's passion to near nonexistence.

Trials and tribulations cannot be avoided. Everyone will



experience suffering in one form or another: dealing with a difficult child or a husband addicted to pornography; caring for an aging parent, a seriously ill or handicapped child, or a needy friend or sibling; divorce, job loss, or financial difficulties; or cancer, an unexpected tragedy, or the loss of a life. Troubles can make you physically, mentally, and emotionally weary. And weariness is a huge threat to passion. I do not have solutions for the varied and complicated trials of life; however, there are a few things we can do to take care of ourselves and protect ourselves from passion leaks.

- *Practice self-awareness.* A mom must be aware of the potential drain and approach stressors with balance and perseverance.
- *Practice conservative time management.* If you know that your days will be unpredictable and potentially exhausting, pad your calendar. That means build in extra time for everything so that if you don't use it, you can rest or regroup.
- *Maintain realistic expectations.* You must allow yourself to let go of anything that is not necessary, because you may not be able to do all that you saw yourself doing as a mom. For example, it is okay to say no to making cupcakes for the class party or babysitting a friend's child.
- *Be flexible.* You may be called to sacrifice time and energy to serve someone else who needs you. And if you are called, you must accept it and be flexible to changing your expectations without bitterness or envy toward others who do not share your trials.



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- *Embrace hope.* Romans 5:3–4 says that “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Know that every trial is a season of suffering. Find comfort in the knowledge that you are building perseverance, character, and hope.
- *Rejoice in serving.* Remember that you are a passionate mom who loves deeply. It is a privilege and a joy to share that passion with others by loving them, devoting yourself to them, and serving them. Romans 12:9–13 tell us, “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

THE PASSIONATE MOM MUST HAVE PASSION

Nehemiah had passion for his people. His passion drove him to action—he was not about to stand by and let his people suffer. He was going to take the initiative and find a way to provide security for them because he loved them. Nehemiah did not allow the enormity of the problem to overwhelm him or confuse him. We will see in the next chapter that he remained passionately hopeful by pouring his passion into prayer that God would provide a way for his people—and that God would use *him* to do it.

Is your passion a bit drained right now? Have you used



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perception and pondering to fuel your passion? Is your passion being funneled into action to protect and provide for your child?

If you choose to zero in on your child's life—to really try to train your child "in the way he should go"—you will need passion (Prov. 22:6). It won't be easy because passionate love does not allow us to back away from difficult tasks; it pushes us to take on challenges that are out of our comfort zones. And when that happens—when you have to do something beyond what you know you can do—that is when you learn to *pray*, believing that God can do the amazing task of raising children through you. Prayer is the next brick in the wall.

The Brick

Passion

The Mortar

Love

Initiative