



Chapter 5:

From Proudful to Purpose-Driven

By Becky Rosty

This section is titled “From Prideful to Purpose-Driven”

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Make Lemonade: Resist Crisis Mode, Redeem Stress, and Reclaim Your Joy

Every Christmas, we set up a toy train around the tree. The sound of the miniature locomotive chug-chugging is a fan-favorite for the kids. They click the tracks together, line the wheels up, and flip the switch with giggles.

One Christmas, my sweet cherubs sometimes set up the nativity scene at one end of the loop, and a train station at the other. They loaded up the train with visitors—wise men and Disney princess dolls alike—traveling to see the newborn Jesus. It was darling and precious and, dare I say, worshipful. But it didn't last long.

Inevitably, my kids gave in to the itch for high speed. They shoved the nativity aside and cranked the knob to *fast*. The train flew around the loop, knocking over Joseph and sending shepherds flying.

The caboose was the worst. It refused to stay shunted to the other cars (thank you, *Thomas the Train*, for the vocabulary lesson). The engine raced on, stripping tree branches of low-hanging ornaments. But the caboose car was flung off the tracks. It crashed into presents and tearing loose the gift-wrapping. My kids were delighted.

If you know anything about Christmas train tracks, you know they are insanely difficult to line the rail car wheels on. My kids thought it would be hilarious to add the caboose back to the track a few inches in front of the engine. Then they crashed the train into the caboose. But the caboose, now in the lead, was dragging a set of wheels. The train stalled, so they cranked the knob to *faster*. Then the whole thing derailed and what was supposed to be a sweet Christmas memory became a not-so-sweet Christmas meltdown.

Every time I think about that train, it reminds me of my own struggle with pride.

The Problem with Pride

Don't you find it fascinating that the word *motive* is found inside *locomotive*? It is a good picture of the inner-workings of the will. Here's how I see it: every "train of thought" is a line of train cars on a track. Ideally, your train is led by a Holy Spirit-filled engine, fueled by altruistic intentions—to follow and honor God, love people, etc. Down the line are other motives: to help others, to succeed, to be seen, to avoid punishment, etc. These should be the secondary reasons we do what we do.

In our ideal line-up, all of our selfish motives, pride, and ego must stay at the back of the train. I call these factors my caboose motives—they shouldn't be driving the train, but they are still a part of it.

Sadly, caboose motives don't always stay where they belong. Like my kids' Christmas train, they want to fly off the tracks and wreak havoc. Often, my caboose motives take over the drive behind why I do what I do. I might still be on the right track, heading in the right direction even, but pride is taking the lead. And that caboose car is full of lemons.

Do you know what happens when your life is led by pride? Everything feels like a crisis. Before long, you feel crazy-out-of-control—a bit *loco*-motive, if you will (*loco* is Spanish for crazy...see what I did there?). A pride-driven life feels sour, and often exhausting. Examine it more closely, however, and you might find the chaos comes from disordered motives, not disorderly events.

I am all too familiar with this. From the outside, you might say I have my life right on track: I have a thriving marriage, beautiful home, and very little financial debt. I am active in ministries and doing my best to raise our four kids according to God's Word. I am on the right track, no doubt, but what you *don't* see is the drive behind it all.

Too often, pride has been the key factor in my "success" even in the Christian-y things. I care way too much about what people think, and even more about what *I* think. My high standards for myself have made me set my own train dial to *fast*. Inevitably, the caboose motive of pride flies off the track. Often, the entire train gets derailed.

Allow me to share some of the grander eye-roll moments when my pride was driving the train:

- When I was more concerned with taking instagram-worthy photos of my daughter playing with her new dollhouse than actually playing dolls with her.
- When I wanted to build our family through adoption instead of pregnancy because my older sister was all about having babies and I wanted to be different than her.
- When I turned a friendly play date at the park into a chance to vent my opinions about how other moms were parenting.
- When I refused to date my crush for 2 years because I valued my singleness. The whole time though, I was a shameless flirt, subconsciously enjoying the power I felt by leading him on then letting him down.

Thankfully, God didn't allow pride to stay in the lead. He convicted me, revealed my egotism, and helped me re-order my motives. I am so thankful God gives me repeated second chances to put my phone down and enjoy my children. It still blows my socks off that God surprised me with a twin pregnancy in the middle of our adoption process, and helped me repent of sisterly comparison (we did, eventually, also get to adopt our amazing son). By His grace, God also retrained my mouth to be an encourager, not a gossip, and thus gain many friendships. Perhaps most humbling of all: God rebuked my pride and provided a loving husband (my crush—the one who waited for me to get over myself!).

Sadly, I still struggle every day with pride trying to drive the train. Why is it so difficult to keep it kicked back to the caboose?

The Little Engine That *Must*

Pride is an inner struggle with arrogance and self-sufficiency. It's the part inside your soul that says "my way," and "I'm in charge". You see it on display when your two-year-old demands to buckle his car seat by himself. You know you haven't grown out of it when, as an adult, you still whine and complain about a suggestion from your boss (or husband!).

Make Lemonade

Proverbs describes pride and arrogance as “the way of evil”. (Proverbs 8:13 ESV) It goes on to say “when pride comes, then comes disgrace,” and that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 11:2 & 16:18 ESV respectively)

If you deconstruct pride in your own life, you might identify a specific anxiety feeding into it—fear of being rejected, or of not measuring up, etc. However, pride’s very existence is born out of our sin nature. It is a fundamental part of every human on this planet. We inherited our pride from Adam and Eve who “wanted to be like God” as we saw in chapter 3 of this book. As long as you live in this life, wrong motives will be a part of your will. The key is to keep them in the caboose.

The more lead-time pride gets, the more it manifests itself falsely as the answer to our problems. Pride feels right at home in seasons of crisis by pining for the attention of others, pouting until someone swoops in with a rescue plan and hours of undivided attention on you. Pride also drives your main-character energy—urging you to rise up and slay the day. With pride leading the train, the “little engine that could” becomes the “stressed-out engine that must”.

While there is nothing wrong with being a high achiever, asking for help, or helping others (the Bible is clear on this!), we need to be cautious. When the desire to impress, influence, or cling to the attention of others becomes what *drives* the train, you know you have a problem. With a subtle but persuasive push, pride nudges us away from Christ. It is the driving force behind *my-source-of-contentment-is-me* (see chapter 1).

So how does a mama turn this lemon into lemonade? Can pride be redeemed?

There is, of course, a healthy way to experience pride. A strong sense of confidence and appreciation for God-given abilities and blessings is a good thing.

For instance, when your child was born, I bet you couldn’t help but beam with pride. You held baby Noah in your arms and gawked at his hair and his lips and shared a hundred pictures with the world. You were so proud of your beautiful tiny human who looked nothing like a potato (even when everyone else’s newborns do, in fact, look like potatoes).

Or when your 1st grader performed her first piano recital, you probably struggled to hold back the pride swelling inside you. Little Lacy had just plunked out the cutest version of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and you found yourself bursting out with cheers at the end of it. You didn’t care that you were in a quiet performance hall; you whooped loud and proud like a soccer mom at the championship game (other moms do this, right? Tell me it’s not just me).

Sadly, many of us struggle to express this *healthy* sense of pride, which I would call confidence or gratitude. However, we don’t see how easily we have let sinful pride become a problem.

Lost Souls

Sometimes, pride shows up in sneakier ways. Maybe you are shy or timid and don't like to be the center of attention. Yet, you compete for your husband’s time and approval. Your need for him to mirror your every emotion causes tension in your marriage.

Perhaps you aren't demanding toward your husband or surrounding community. You’ve checked all contentment boxes, until it comes to your kids. You get aggravated every time someone suggests hiring a trustworthy babysitter so you can have a night out. You despise the idea of church nursery or kids classrooms. You pine for your child’s attention, feeling less than whole when they begin to spread their wings. This can be another symptom of pride driving the train.

(Side note: Always make sure your church provides background checks for every childcare provider. Review the child-protection policies. You can also volunteer in children’s ministry to get to know the processes and help your child feel safe and comfortable too).

On the outside, you seem like you are on the right track, chugging along brilliantly. You are a present friend, hard-working volunteer, doting wife, and fierce mama-bear. But inside you know you are not motivated by intimacy, kindness, or protection.

Disney and Pixar created a powerful illustration of this tragedy in the animated movie *Soul*. When passionate people get overly fixated, they morph into mindless monsters—lost souls “obsessed with something that disconnects them from life” (*Soul*, Disney Pixar, 2020). The first time I watched *Soul*, I felt my chest tighten at the realization of my own propensity to become a lost soul *mom*-ster.

This is what the Bible calls a hard heart. Maybe you have been stuck in a “one best way” to experience motherhood. You thought the mom-philosophy would set you free, but you were actually swallowed up by the constant maintenance of that lifestyle. Loneliness is the result when pride fills a room, leaving no space for other’s ideas or companionship.

Or maybe you find it challenging to co-parent with the father of your children. You feel defeated when you cannot convince him to do things your way (whether you are currently married to him or not may exasperate this struggle, one way or the other). So pride stomps in wearing bossy pants and a portfolio of reasons your parenting strategy is better. You say you want to be a supportive co-parent, but more often than not, you just wish he would be a clone of yourself, mom 2.0.

Pride can show up in how you feed and diaper your newborn baby to how you educate your budding geniuses. How you arrange your home, schedule, budget, and screen time can all be a direct result of the bossy lost soul in your head.

What if pride was dictating our intentions for motherhood because we have never stopped to ask what God says they should be? Think about it: what is the actual *purpose* of motherhood?

What Exactly Is The plan?

“Well, I kept my kids alive today, that’s a win for me!” I commented one day, only half-joking with the other moms at the park. In our efforts to take the pressure off each other (and ourselves), we tend to miss the bigger picture. We know there’s so much more to what we do as moms than just keeping our kids fed, clean, and breathing, but we struggle to put it into words.

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Thankfully, the Lord doesn't leave us guessing when it comes to His purpose for us:

“Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

(Micah 6:8 CSB)

Often we think the job is to raise good humans: citizens that contribute to society, vote the “right” way, and change their underwear regularly. Unfortunately, if these have been your goals for motherhood, you might be missing the point.

Notice that this verse says nothing about the outcome. It doesn't say “the Lord requires you to produce a clean house, nutritious meals, obedient children, and a satisfied spouse.” No, God's intention for your life is never about how it turns out, because He is the only one who controls the outcome! Your purpose in life (and motherhood) is never about the results, it is always about your response.

How are you going to respond to the kindness and grace of Jesus who loved you enough to die on the cross, trading his sonship for your sin-nature? How are you going to live in light of His rising from the dead that you might have power to live in newness of life? How will you mother in such a way as to depend on Jesus for the results?

According to Micah 6:8, to move forward with your purpose you must first simplify your agenda. In God's design, your purpose in life and motherhood is not that complicated. You must act, love, and walk with God. Leave the final product up to him!

Secondly, you must get your motives in order. When justice, faithfulness, and humility drive the train, you have the energy and momentum you need to keep going. Keep the caboose motive of pride where it belongs.

You might not hear “humble mama” and think, “oh yea, that's the kind of mother I want to be.” We have much more sexy words to describe motherhood now: crunchy mom; tiger mom; balanced mom; silky mom (or my favorite “scrunchy mom”). One way or another, all these labels appeal to your pride. What if it was time to drop the labels and take up the mantle of motherhood, full of purpose to bring hope to the world?

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Years ago, MOPs International (now MOMCO) used a promotional statement that cheered, “Let’s Raise The World Together.” Those 5 words have changed the way I looked at motherhood. Often motherhood feels like 8,000 small minutes of managing something mundane or meaningless, like spilled milk or sibling fights. But the invitation to raise the world? That feels like an invitation to a grand adventure. It stirs up a sense of purpose.

What if God didn’t give you children to merely keep them alive? What if He made you a mama to be an integral part of His powerful kingdom initiative? Alongside other Christian parents around the globe, you get to share God’s light and love with the next generation! And, together, we all get to raise them to carry on the same light and love to the world around *them*.

Moms don’t pause our dreams for 18 years to raise a kid; rather we press in to *God’s dreams* for 18 years of spiritual investment that will last eternity. Moms don’t just keep our kids alive; we get to show them how to *live* alive in the abundance Jesus offers (John 10:10).

In Christ, you get to train up good-news bringers and mercy-givers, truth-speakers and shame-breakers! It’s more than a survival of our species; motherhood is your chance to leave a legacy.

So, on the days you feel stuck on an endless cycle of booger-wiping, let God’s purpose for you act as a railway switch, re-routing you off the identity crisis track and onto the trajectory of kingdom-minded motherhood. Because, as Dr. John Trainer once said, “Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work.”¹

The best news? You don’t have to do it all perfectly! God sent his son so that grace might abound, even in this most important of purposes called motherhood. While this is good news, it is still crucial to keep your motives in the right order.

¹ <https://www.cslewis.org/aboutus/faq/quotes-misattributed/> Dr. John Trainer, though this quote is often wrongly attributed to C.S. Lewis

Time to Line Up

Your life may be headed in the right direction, but if you are exhausted, resentful, anxious, and discontent, it is time to re-order your motives. God designed you for an abundant life, fueled by His mercy and His love, not by an inflated ego. A life led by wrong motives is a life robbed of energy and momentum. Self-sabotage is inevitable when you are led by a caboose that was never meant to be an engine.

God knew we would struggle with pride and mixed motives. We see a clear example of this in the Bible. God created the Israelite nation with a holy and specific purpose—to be a light and a voice revealing the one true God to all nations:

“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:17-18 ESV

“...I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6 ESV

Instead of humbly walking out their purpose, however, the Israelites reveled in their own self-glorification. God’s people traded their purpose for pridefulness. To draw them back, God used the nations—who were supposed to be *blessed* by the Israelites—as His instruments for correction. Pride enslaved the Israelites, figuratively and literally..

Like the Israelites, we sidestep our purpose when we get consumed with self. Thankfully, the Lord will not allow our pride to drag us around, just as He did not leave Israel in captivity. God use Israel’s time in slavery to teach them humility. As their hearts changed and they reached out to God, He answered as a loving Father. He reinstated their purpose in one of the most beloved verses in the Bible:

“For I know the plans I have for you” — this is the Lord’s declaration — “plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me

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and find me when you search for me with all your heart. I will be found by you” — this is the Lord’s declaration — “and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and places where I banished you” — this is the Lord’s declaration. “I will restore you to the place from which I deported you.” (Jeremiah 29:11-14 CSB)

Ironically, God never intended Israel to be impressive; rather, He planned to use their weakness to set the stage for the Savior of the world. He redeemed their mistakes, using their prideful rebellion to show the world that *everyone* needs a Savior, and that God will use broken things to show His glory.

Like the Israelites, you can set the stage for God’s grace to be on display when you acknowledge your own insufficiency. In your weakness, God’s strength is made evident to a hurting world:

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.’” (2 Corinthians 12:9 CSB)

Every lemon can be turned into lemonade, if we are willing to be humble enough to admit it. As we learned in chapter 2, the stress created by pride can absolutely be redeemed. If this is you—your life is full of drama because pride is leading the train—take this moment to pause your life, reorder your motives, and continue again with joy.

Fear of the Lord

The Bible calls this kind of humility “fear of the Lord.” In other words, you start becoming more concerned with what God thinks than with what your heart feels. You prioritize His agenda over yours. You replace self-focus with God focus.

Humility isn’t easy, but the Bible shows us the benefits are worth it.

- “When arrogance comes, disgrace follows, but with humility comes wisdom.”

(Proverbs 11:2 CSB)

- “Before his downfall a person’s heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.”

(Proverbs 18:12 CSB)

- “Humility, the fear of the Lord, results in wealth, honor, and life.” (Proverbs 22:4 CSB)

In addition to the honor, wealth, life and wisdom mentioned in Proverbs, you also receive greater intimacy with God (James 4:6), a relatability with Christ (Philippians 2:3-5), and freedom from anxiety (1 Peter 5:5-7). Fear of the Lord is the key to contentment—I can do all things through *Christ* who is my strength!

When you turn your attention off your ego and onto the Lord, you are set free to live out your purpose. Your motives line up, and you can chugga-chugga your way forward again, without the odd wheel of pride dragging the train down.

All Aboard the Love Train

Its only through a deep intimacy with Christ that out-of-order motives can be revealed. Not surprisingly, the Bible has a lot to say about it:

- “[the Lord] will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God.” (1 Corinthians 4:5 CSB)
- “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 CSB)
- “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24 ESV)

God clearly cares about the order of our motives. With your hand in His, you can joyfully rebel against pride.

Loving yourself is a good way to keep your caboose motives at the front of the train, dragging you down. Instead, focus on God’s love for you. It will fuel the holy engine, which propels you into contentment.

But what about the anxiety that makes your pride fly off the rails and take the lead? The Father speaks tenderly to that as well:

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“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:6-7 CSB

Receiving God’s love puts your motives in the right order, and provides sustainable momentum for growth. Caboose motives of pride, praise from others, or self-actualization can never provide that. Walk humbly with God, elevate Him (not self), and receive His love. Let these actions heap hot coals in the engine driving your true purpose.

Here’s a practical way to do this: dedicate every little thing to the Lord in worship:

“Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.” (Colossians 3:23-24 CSB)

Notice it doesn’t say “when you do important things...” or “when you have the right motives...” Rather, the Bible says, “*Whatever* you do”! There are so many ambiguous “whatever’s” in motherhood. Isn’t it a relief that every single one of them counts in Christ?

Waddling your pregnant self through the panty liner aisle at Walmart can be worship.

Washing sticky fingers after a snack can be worship.

Whisking a screaming toddler out of a restaurant for a time-out can be worship.

Working on a homework project with your 1st grader can be worship.

Warning the office about your plans to attend your daughter’s field trip can be worship.

Waking earlier to work on “non-mom” projects can be worship.

Whispering “hey sexy” into your husband’s ear while folding laundry can be worship.

Wringing out your anger while washing dishes can be worship.

“Wasting time” to straighten out a bump in a child’s sock can be worship.

Welcoming a neighbor boy for after-school snacks can be worship.

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Wiping noses and butts and tears can be worship—perhaps the most profound way we worship!

In beautiful simplicity, God's Word can transform everything. The mundane tasks of motherhood matter for the kingdom of God and can be rewarding.

Of course, they don't always *feel* rewarding, but that's ok! Because God says *He* will provide a reward for the work done for His glory!

“knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord...”

(Colossians 3:24 CSB)

This means when you stop trying to prop up your own ego, God will do it for you. He gets glory and you get an inheritance as a royal daughter of God, already seated in the heavens (Ephesians 2:3-7)!

“We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:3-7 CSB

Our fleshly desires, our caboose motives, are characteristics of a past life. Now in Christ, we get to live with royal confidence—a joyful, lemonade-in-hand kind of humility. And with that kind of purpose in mind, darling, you can enjoy the journey.

Squeeze the Day:

PERSONAL REFLECTION & GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What is an iconic Christmas memory for you—from your own childhood or from you kids' experience?
2. Have you ever noticed how pride (yours or someone else's) derailed your momentum before?
3. Have you ever considered your purpose in motherhood? What were some of your goals? Have they changed in light of Micah 6:8?
4. What would it look like for you to fully embrace your purpose in life and motherhood?
5. What is one seemingly small act of motherhood you can use to worship Jesus this week?

SCRIPTURE:

Read Ephesians 2 (the whole chapter). Notice the contrast between pride and old life vs. your purpose as a believer. How does identity play a part in purpose? How does this change how you want to live?

LISTEN TO:

Your Way's Better by Forrest Frank

Lead Me to the Cross by Hillsong UNITED, Brooke Ligertwood