

Christian Vocation: Julie Powell, stay-at-home parent & homeschooler

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Preacher: Julie Powell

[0 : 00] And I think that the fall falls very heavily on the thing, the curses that God gave, you know, that were incurred to Adam and Eve very specifically affect the relationships in the family.

What was it that Eve was told? I don't know. This is the audience interaction part. Tyler, what was the curse that fell upon you?

That she would want to rule over her husband. That her desire would be for her husband, and he would rule over her. And what else?

Oh, yeah. The pain and childbearing. You do wonder what it would have been like before the fall. But I can tell you from a pretty solid sample size, it doesn't get any easier.

Do you just wonder? I'm sure it's not supposed to be this way. And it's not. It wasn't supposed to be this way. And it is hard. And for those of you who don't know me, I'm going to explain a little bit more when you have a picture of them.

[1 : 11] But I have eight children and a husband. And I do want to say that I know what a privilege it is to do what I do.

It's not something that works for every family. Please stop talking. I've been very blessed that my husband's been able to have a job, to hold a job, to provide for a lot of people.

That does not happen for everyone. And so what I've been able to do is by no means the way to do it. You've probably heard of the mommy wars.

And I think this is the idea that, oh, the way that I do it is better than somehow, you know, even more godly than the way that she does it. It's so easy to compare.

This is another part of the fall. So easy to compare. And to feel less than. There's also, I think, in our culture, this idea that some people are just super mom.

[2 : 16] They've got it all together. They're well-groomed. Their children look wonderful. They've been able to train them well. Their homes are gorgeous. Or even just keeping it all together, which would be a super human feat.

But there aren't any super moms. And I am certainly nowhere near being able to do it all. As I said, the fall does fall.

The curses fall heavily on the family. So I think that as a mother in a family, there's the practical aspect. Just doing the laundry, doing the dishes.

How do I plan what we're going to eat? But so much of it is relational. And I'm a sinner.

And all my kids are sinners. Little bundles of original sin. And so it goes from this lovely, beatific vision.

[3 : 20] Darling, delightful, smiling children. Which I think people think is probably what a lot of my life is like. Because when I look at other women, I think, oh, their children are just lovely.

And it can go to this in about five seconds. Which was the difference in time between when I took that photograph. And when I took that photograph.

Editing helps. But I see it in myself. This is how I am. This is even how I interact with God. One moment, I think I'm doing pretty well.

And the next moment, I realize the hardness. And the ungratefulness of my heart. Discontent. So this is really...

You like that, Melissa? And you laugh. And this is how it often feels.

[4 : 25] You are trying, under somewhat trying circumstances, to really make it all work for all the people. But the fact is, of course we can't. But this really quite disgusting picture does remind us.

It still reminds me of scripture. What verse does that bring to mind for you? Into the shadow of his way. Yeah.

Yeah. So, the book also speaks about each bit of creative and ordering work that we do is a reflection and outpouring of God's character.

Who he is. His creative essence. Him as creator. All right. We'll get rid of that. So, here's my dog. And look, don't we all look great? It's all cleaned up. And I have to give photo credit to Sarah Cameron because I did set it up, but she clicked the shutter. So, here is what we do tend to do.

[5 : 36] A nice sanitized version for a Christmas card where everybody is clothed and in their right minds. And standing in front of a truck, James needs me to say this, that he paid for by fishing salmon in Alaska.

Yeah. So, here they are. What I've been doing for the last 24 years. I found an old diary from when I was first pregnant with James.

And I did know I was pregnant, but I wrote, if this is morning sickness or pregnancy sickness, I'm going to die.

I was desperately sick from seven weeks to at least 17 weeks. I had every baby, some more.

There you go. In pain, you'll bear children. It is not pleasant. James, by the time I was pregnant with the next one and then the next one, would come into the bathroom and pretend to gag with me.

[6 : 45] I'm very well practiced in trying to control the nausea. My youngest is right there.

He's five. James just turned 23 last week. And, yeah. That's what I've been doing.

And it is good to look and see, wait, God has done this. I've been able to be part of this. We are actually in this picture clothed and in our right minds.

Because sometimes when you get in the weeds of it, it doesn't feel like that. And it's easy for the enemy to just keep saying, it's not working. They're all going to turn out horribly. You have screwed them up so badly.

So it's nice to have a little reminder that God is at work. He does create order. And sometimes we can really enjoy that. So I told you I have eight children.

[7 : 47] But in that picture, there are seven. One of the, I think everyone's vocation, whatever it is that they do and what they're called to, is part of God's shaping, teaching, training us.

What we do, the way we spend our time reveals our idols. And what we want reveals our idols.

When James was born, I was going to be the perfect mother.

I was starting from fresh. This was going to be the kid who had every possible educational opportunity, every emotional support and psychological adjustment.

And we were just going to knock this out of the park. This was going to be perfect. Of course I can say that. You just know what an idiotic thing that is to say.

But I knew everything that went into that kid, body, mind, and soul, and everything that came out.

And I was really controlling. And I think it was important.

[8 : 54] I know there's another slide we'll get to in a minute. And for God to reveal that I don't get to control at all. And so James was, I had James, he was four, and Grace was two.

And I had a son. The day after James turned four, Benjamin was born. And we had just moved to Connecticut a year before. And we had a lovely, lovely fall with him.

He was born in September, 19 years ago. And we traveled to California. We went to a wedding. My family all got to meet him. And we got to have Christmas together.

And then in January of 2000, I went to pick him up from his crib. And he was dead. And so you don't get to control.

Sometimes we do say, you know, all I have to do is keep him alive through the day. We cannot keep our children alive. Only God gives us each breath.

[10 : 01] And certainly it's God who gives our children breath. He made them. There were so many beautiful graces and lovely touches of the Lord through that time.

But it struck to my identity because that's where I believed I was going to be this mother who could make it all happen. And I couldn't.

Thankfully, God has been very gracious over these 19 years. And many of you have been instruments of God in helping me to process what it is that God is doing through Benjamin's last. Also through all of the other amazingnesses of life. And I do think that if Benjamin had lived, we might have been very content with our little family with three kids.

And it felt like it was all kind of perfect and done. And I am thankful for the five children that we had after that. Maybe a little excessive.

[11:11] But God is a God of abundance. So I am very thankful for that shaping. But believe me, it was ugly.

I have a calendar on my bathroom counter. A yearly calendar that I've used since I was married. And it has a reference to this lonely twisted path of anguish.

And I think that many of you know that path. And I'm really thankful for the community that God provides to be able to walk through some of these things.

I think another idol that God was revealing was my identity and my kids' achievements. This is a somewhat generic picture.

One of my kids is in it. Yeah, I think that this is endemic. Once we...

[12:16] Once... I was out of the academic push. I got my degree. I was... I... I had done my thing.

Now I was pouring it all into my kids. And the way that they turned out, I felt, reflected on me. We are called, obviously, to do everything that we can to provide and support and teach and train our children.

However, we don't get to control it. And I can remember one time, it was a small thing. I dropped one kid off and that kid hadn't turned in a piece of homework.

Or I had forgotten to talk to a coach. I don't even remember what the issue was. But I remember my intense distress at this failure of my child.

And it was a small thing. I was literally, after I dropped the kid off, screaming in pain in the car. I probably needed psychological help.

[13:22] But to realize that I was taking all of this on. And it's been helpful, another gift of God, to show it's not about me.

I don't get to control it. I don't get to choose all of the things. I do want my kids to do well.

I want to teach them to be excellent in what they choose and what God has made them to do. But it's not a personal reflection on me.

And if I could take my, and I'm so not good at this. This is a daily, minute-by-minute, actually, struggle. I do take it personally. I take it really personally. And that's the way that you can pray.

I think probably for all mothers that we realize, wait, this is between me and God. This is between God and my kids. This is not a reflection of who I am.

[14:25] So I think that this is another part of what mothering brings me to. Every hour, every minute, actually every second, I need God to do it.

So handing a lot of that control over, as I said, this is not a done deal at all. This is a minute-by-minute really struggling and often failing.

And often there are hours that go by where I forget to ask for that help. And I keep taking it all back. And it never goes well. I lost the slide somewhere.

As I said, I homeschool. I was homeschooled for a short period of time. I probably would have been a happier person if I could have been homeschooled all the way through.

But I was a really self-motivated learner. And, yeah, not all of my kids are. Again, I take it personally.

[15:33] But I just really, really like this quote. So I'll put it up there and you can take a look at that. True education is a form of repentance. It is a humble admission that we've not read all that we need to read.

We don't know all that we need to know. And we've not yet become all that we're called to become. Education is that unique form of discipline that brings us to the place of admitting our inadequacies.

It is that remarkable rebuke of autonomy and independence. So powerful and so evident that we actually shut up and pay heed for a change. So what questions do you have so far before I move further into the schooling part?

What do your personal devotions look like? What do personal devotions look like?

Well, it changes. I would love to say that I spend three hours in prayer before the kids get up every morning. But that's not realistic for me.

[16:50] I've learned a lot from other mothers. I have no idea if this is still on. Sorry. I've learned so much.

I have to wake up. I taught the kids a poem. Good morning, Jesus. Now it's yours.

Good morning, dear Jesus. This day is for you. Good morning, dear Jesus. This day is for you. I pray that you bless all I think, say, and do. Right? Sometimes I wake up to pray the Lord's Prayer. And I'm aware of making that a habit. I have several email chains that come through. Josh Moody publishes one every day. If you don't get that, it's well done. I follow several from mothers who blog and share.

[17 : 57] And that's been really helpful. I don't like to read the Bible on my phone. I like to read the Bible on a page.

But that doesn't always happen. And sometimes, you know, the next thing happens and you've got to get up and the toilet's overflowing or the dog threw up. And so it's helpful to have those scriptures around the house.

As I said, I'm on a bathroom counter popping up in my email. Sometimes I am able to spend an hour or half an hour even if that's all it can be.

But a lot of times that looks like planning out my day. God, what is it that I need to do today? How does the scripture tie in? I love the reading through Colossians every week idea.

So it's something different most days. But being in the word has to be the start of the day.

[19 : 01] Because if you start off without that, you're starting off behind. I think all of us know that. But making a good habit of it has really been important for me.

And it is a habit that I learned as a teenager through mostly positive peer pressure. But in our youth group, you could be called upon at any time to share your quiet time thought. So be ready.

So there was this, you know, if you didn't have one, you could always recycle one from the previous week. But have a quiet time thought. What is it that God needs to say to me today? I really appreciated this book.

I thought it was so helpful. Especially since what I do is so relational. There's not a split of, oh, I do this non-Christian work.

And then I do my devotions. It's all a big swirling maelstrom of trying to work with what God is doing in my family.

[20 : 04] So I thought this was great. And it's towards the end of the book. But it was so helpful to me. And I'll explain a bit. The integration of faith and work is the opposite of dualism.

Dualism is the idea that there is the secular realm and the spiritual realm. And we do this work. And then we meet with God. Our thick, this is an old version, sorry.

Our thick view of sin will remind us that even explicitly Christian work and culture will always have some idolatrous discourse within it. Our thick view of common grace will remind us that even explicitly non-Christian work and culture will always have some witness to God's truth in it.

Right before this, he was talking about threads of Christianity where we seek to cut ourselves off or remove ourselves, separate ourselves from the secular, from what is non-Christian.

It could look like a million things. It could be being Amish. That kind of extent where I'm going to remove myself from technology.

[21 : 21] I'm only going to watch Christian films or I'm only going to read Christian books. I'm only going to go to places where, or let my kids go to places that are explicitly Christian.

We're still there and we're still sinners. The sin in our own hearts is so pervasive that even if we try to sanitize our environment as much as possible, idols will still be built up in our own hearts.

And, you know, you think, oh, we have this nice little microcosm of God's creation in our family out in the woods with our animals.

And I get to choose all organic food. No, I don't. At all. And yet, as I said, we're all sinners.

Our children are born in sin. And as you all know, families are the best at ripping each other apart and tearing each other down.

[22 : 33] And our goal is to build each other up. So I can control my kids' environment as much as I like. And it's useless because there's always this idolatrous discourse.

And in my own heart, too, as I said, the control and the pride. So I think view of common grace will remind us that even non-Christian work has some witness to God's truth.

God in his amazing goodness to us, even though everything is corrupted, has left so many sparkling shards, pieces of his image and his creative intent in our beautiful world that we're never away from him.

There's nowhere that we can go that's away from him. So I think that this was a wonderful way to express what I'm really trying to do in educating my kids. We will adopt a stance of critical

enjoyment of human culture.

We will learn to recognize the half-truths and resist the idols. I think I need to write this on my mirror and say, this is what I'm trying to do.

[23 : 47] Lord, show me where I'm building up a culture that is idolatrous, that is relying on self rather than on you, that is allowing something else to be in the place of trusting.

And this is what I would love to see for my kids. So sometimes you do get to see as a mother the results, as I said. It does look good.

And it's good to see, wait, this is where God has worked. The book talks about the fact that since God has created us, and God has created us for work, to be partners with him in his work of creation, and furthering the good of this world, building each other up.

Every form of work is a reflection, whether it's with your hands or with your mind. Obviously, the culture that we have in the U.S.

is very heavily skewed to this idea that there's professional work, and then there's manual work, menial work. And this is not scriptural at all.

[25 : 15] The gospel gives us tremendous freedom to choose we're not earning our salvation, we're not earning brownie points.

The way that God made us is the way that he wants us to work in the world and glorify him. So it has been fun to see my own preconceptions being broken down by God.

You know, I did have an idea that my kids would go to college and be brilliant and follow some profession, and yet I was really aware when James was born that he should not be sitting behind a desk.

It's just not the way that he's made. I will admit that I was one who pushed for him to go into engineering in college because I felt like it felt safe.

So what am I relying on? Yeah, that didn't go so well. And after a semester and a half, thankfully he was able to switch into something that he really loved, which was fisheries management.

[26 : 30] Did you know you could get a degree in fishing? And as I said, he did actually go and fish. And it is fun to see him following what he wants to do.

Right now he sells boats, and he's good at it. I could not sell anything. I cannot, I'm just not good at selling. And my older two kids are good at selling things that they love.

They're not me. I'm not them. And that is, I really want to learn the freedom of that and to be able to do what God has made me to do without considering all this other stuff.

When I was first, first had James and Grace, I struggled horribly with postpartum depression, which I was going to be praying to anyway since I've dealt with depression all my life.

But it was really heavy on my heart that I wanted to be able, at some point, later stage, to contribute to other mothers and support them. So God has very graciously given me a part in a ministry that supports mothers of all ages.

[27 : 49] The one where I work is in Madison. There are women from more than 20 churches. But there's about 100 women who come every Thursday. And half of them don't go to church at all.

So this is an outreach. And women are just flocking to find this community, to find a place where they are not judged for the way that they're doing whatever it is that they're doing, but that they're accepted and supported.

And it's my desire, the desire of those who work there to, that God's word be beginning to work in their hearts, those who don't know him.

But I just, I smile because it's such a wonderful gift of God that he's brought me through his 20-some years of changing diapers and being pregnant and nursing.

And, you know, it's just grueling. I think I figured I probably changed 25,000 diapers. So glamorous.

[29 : 06] This is the first year since 1995 that I do not daily change diapers. And yet, to be able to speak into women's lives is a really sweet gift.

This is about wisdom. I know we need to wrap up. Knowing God. This is a tough one for me because I grew up truly believing deep down in my heart that God doesn't hear me.

Not because of what I was told explicitly, but because of what I was learning implicitly. So this is the constant way that God's working.

I love you. I care. I want to hear you. And I believe that that will help me to be less controlled by anxiety and pride. Knowing ourselves, knowing our children is really important.

Wait, what is this kid? As I said, what is this kid's gifting desire? If I'm working against that, I'm not working the way that God has made them.

[30 : 19] I'm not being a co-laborer with the Lord. I want to know what is it that I need to know about myself? How am I? I am not, as I said, a detailed person.

So you're getting a slightly roundabout over the view here. Yeah, so I do want to be not this foolish heart that doesn't learn from what God's taught me through what I've been doing.

I don't want to be this proud heart that blames others for the way things are. And I really want for my kids to learn those things too. Yeah, I really always wanted to do this and I'm so, so thankful that God has provided it for me.

But when I'm running on two or three hours of sleep and I have to show up, you know, I have to get someone somewhere and the dog threw up and the toilet overflowed and, you know, it's not, it's really not that glamorous.

It's just not. It doesn't mean I chose the wrong path. I think anyone's going to be frustrated in their work at times. So, to remember that whatever you're doing, God is shaping you.

[31 : 37] I taught from a book on parenting by Paul David Tripp and one of his things was God is parenting you as you parent your children. The way that he's working in their lives is working to shape your life.

And I think that it's just tremendously freeing, especially as a mother. Our work will always fall short and that's just how it is in this world. But we have the promise that it'll be fulfilled when he makes the new heavens and the new earth.

Come Lord Jesus. The Colossians passages have been tremendously helpful to me. These are verses that I prayed for my kids and my husband and myself.

some of these look like they're doing things but I really appreciate this part, being strengthened with all power so that you may have full endurance and patience.

You know, we've just got to do the next thing. Whatever is set before you, that's the next thing. You know, we might like it to be more of an epiphany than that.

[32 : 48] But if it is that, wait, I'm working on this top but yeah, the toilet is overflowing. That really did happen on Friday while I was doing it.

And CSOS said children are not the interruption to your work. They are the work. You know, how do I receive that graciously? I don't, often.

But I think it's where I want to be going. This is a wonderful expression of what I've really want.

What I really want as a mother is for my kids to know the Lord. But that is not something that I can manufacture. So I loved this.

We are not the Holy Spirit. We cannot prick the hearts of our children and cultivate a repentant spirit in them. We cannot draw out rebellion or replace it with surrender or obedience or humility.

[33 : 46] We cannot soften a heart or create a dependence on Jesus or manipulate the soul into loving God. We cannot mass produce conviction. The only thing we can do is love our kids, point them to Jesus, and create space for the Holy Spirit to do his work.

Jesus is after our mama hearts as much as he's after the hearts of our kids. And I can't do that. I'm here to tell you that Jesus is forever asking our hearts one thing.

Do you trust me with your children? I think he's actually just asking, do you trust me? And do you trust me with your children? Tonight, I'm in the full throes of wanting to distrust the heart of Jesus.

I'm wanting to challenge his plan and question his method for capturing the hearts of my kids. I'm wanting to move into full-on damage control and behavior modification and manipulated repentance.

But quite frankly, I'm tired. My kids are getting older. I'm 23 years for me into this mother's gig. And I know my plan won't work. I am not my kids Holy Spirit.

[34 : 51] So, that is my prayer for my kids. And I am so thankful that God is at work. Any further, what further comments, questions?

Ma'am? I was just wondering, you obviously had a strong sense of calling or vocation, but I know some women don't necessarily, but once you're in it, it kind of is your vocation.

Yeah. So, I was just wondering, how does that concept of it being your vocation keep you going through those hard times? I think I have a negative answer to that.

It was much more of a sense of there's nothing else I can do, which is probably, you know, it's not true, but it definitely has been my sense that, yeah, I've just got to keep going.

I have started to develop some other skills and that's been a great outlet, but yeah, I think it has been negative in my life and I think that that's not a very God honoring way to look at it, so I'm really thankful to be getting to a point where I can kind of look at it more positively, but it's difficult to look at it positively when you're really that under it.

[36 : 18] Thank you. Yeah. And as I said, I don't know how it works out for everybody else. It is definitely the one thing that I can see myself doing.

What else? Ma'am? You talked in the beginning about your husband and he's doing the role that God would require of him as provider, protector, and the priest of your family.

All of your pronouns were my children and I'm wondering how you fit into that triangle of relationship with your husband.

Well, I think I can only speak as me. And I think that that's true, that a lot of times it does operate as my purview.

This is what I have to do because he was doing other things, you know, his work and such. So, yeah, I can only speak for myself.

[37 : 30] They are my children, also they are our children. So, that's a really thoughtful point. And, yeah, I can only speak as my, from my point of view, but you're right.

It is a, it is an organic group. Thank you. Thanks, Julie.

As we've done the last couple of times, we're going to pray for Julie and for others who are mothers. So, Jeff, could I ask you to come and pray for Julie and for others who are mothers or parents invested in raising children.

Do I really need this? Yes, no. No. Thank you. Yes. Our Father in heaven, we know that you, as we all go about doing what you've called us to do, as we face our fears and as we face our inadequacies, that we would cast ourselves upon you, that we would look to you to find our meaning and purpose, that you would flood our hearts with joy as we realize that by receiving Jesus, we are your children and we are established and we have heaven to look forward to.

And we do pray for Julie and for all mothers that you would provide everything they need to step into their roles competently and with confidence and that you would use them mightily and that, Father, you would save our children and intervene.

[39 : 35] And it's in your son's name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.