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IS BACK!
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Majoring in Motherhood

a crash course in Gospel truth
for the hardest, messiest, most
glorious job in the world

Emily Schurch

WHAT'S FOR DINNER

PLAN

SHOP



Majoring in Motherhood

a crash course in Gospel truth
for the hardest, messiest, most
glorious job in the world

Emily Schuch

To my husband, who has been my constant encourager
To my dad, who taught me the power of words
And to my mom, the ultimate Mom Lady



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“I’ve never met Emily, but she is now my mom-friend. She gets me. She knows the beautiful, messy chaos of raising children and, even better, she knows how to encourage my weary heart. You will consider her a friend too after reading her sweet book. She will make you laugh and think hard about why God has called you to major in motherhood. Best of all, she will point you to Jesus.”

Kristen Wetherell, mom of three and author of *Humble Moms* and the *For the Bible Tells Me So* board book series

“*Majoring in Motherhood* is a joy-filled book that helps you to laugh at some of the truly trying days of motherhood with young children. Emily reminds us not only of the difficult task we undertake as moms but also of the deep significance and meaning of what is often seen as mundane and unimportant by our surrounding culture. We need to be reminded of the holy calling of motherhood and how God works in and through us as we serve our children. If you need encouragement as a mom of little ones, get this book and let Emily guide you into deeper thinking on our role as mothers.”

Erin Kunkle, co-host of the Maven Truth Parent Podcast, mom of five

“Emily Schuch is the professor of parenthood you’ve been waiting for. In her masterclass on being a mom she shares a window into her own motherhood journey, the good and the bad, as she gives readers a crash course on leading a household and more importantly, how it teaches us the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Majoring in Motherhood* is as witty as it is helpful and it’ll bless any mom who picks it up.”

Adam and Chelsea Griffin, parents of three sons, host the Family Discipleship Podcast. Adam is an author and Lead Pastor of Eastside Community Church

“*Majoring in Motherhood* will have you laughing and crying in the same chapter, as Emily relates her motherhood experiences. Every mom can relate to her stories of motherhood, and will be encouraged by the Truth she shares. Motherhood can be one of the loneliest, hardest jobs in the world, but Emily reminds you that you are doing a holy, God-honoring work. **This is a great read for moms of any season**, but I can’t wait to give it to new, expectant moms to read during those middle of the night feedings when moments of encouragement and laughter are hard to find.”

Jenny Worsham, Co-founder of Gather Moms

“Emily did an excellent job of communicating the hilarious, hard, beautiful, sanctifying, and relatable facets of motherhood while continually pointing back to the gospel. The reminders of God’s sovereignty, faithfulness, sustenance, and grace are both convicting and encouraging in ways that pushed me toward Christlikeness in

motherhood. This book ministered to me in more ways than I can count!

Kristen Young, Social Influencer and Mom of 5

“Majoring in Motherhood is an invitation to belonging for all mothers, reminding us we are not alone. With relatable humor and treasures of biblical truths, Emily Schuch offers profound encouragement, inspiring mothers to live like Jesus. These parable-esque stories will strengthen those who are in the middle of the Hardest, Messiest, Most Glorious Job in the World.”

Heather Jonsson, Bible Teacher, Host of the Bold Mercies Podcast

“Spunky, hilarious, and oh-so-real. Schuch had me laughing ‘til I cried. With wisdom and wit, she created the world’s first degree taught in a way that makes you feel like you’re having coffee with a friend. That’s my kind of major! Now, I finally know what I want to be when I grow up: a mom doing life alongside Jesus and ladies like Emily Schuch.”

Kelsey Gillespy, author of *In the Trenches: Finding God Through Parenting Littles*

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Orientation Day

Speaking One Mom to Another

I get the last load of laundry running while the other two finished laundry piles lie in a towering mound on my bed, waiting to be folded and put away. I tell myself that I am definitely getting to them today just like I told myself yesterday ... and the day before. The laundry reminds me of the mythological Hydra—once you cut off one head, two more would grow in its place. Or in my house, once you get one load of laundry put away, two more appear in its place. At least that's how it feels sometimes—never-ending. *This is how I'm going to go, I think. The laundry is going to kill me. There will be headlines: "Local Mom Found Buried under Pile of Dirty Onesies."*

Once I close the washing machine lid, I move on to clean up the dishes and remnants of lunch. The dried applesauce that my son dropped under the high chair yesterday stares me in the face. *That's going to require hands-and-knees scrubbing. Don't have time for that.*

My applesauce thoughts are punctuated by the

call—not of the wild, but of the pooppy and incompetent. “Moooooommmmy! I need you to wipe my butt!”

I successfully wipe the butt, then rush to change the sheets the baby leaked on the night before. Nap-time glimmers like a beacon of hope. *You can do this. Just change one more diaper, sing “Jesus Loves Me” as fast as you can, and then you can go eat Ghirardelli dark chocolate as a reward ... quietly, so the “others” won’t hear you.*

I get the baby down and close the door. *Victory!* But as I stand there in the corner of my kitchen, chewing on my chocolate prize, I start to wonder ... *How did I end up like this? The resident butt-wiper? Was this the vision I’d had for life?* I had potential once. I was going places. I’m not sure where those places *were* exactly, but I don’t think they looked anything like the dark recesses of my son’s closet that I planned to reorganize over the weekend. And I’m pretty sure they didn’t include battling the Laundry Hydra or getting regular requests for butt-wiping.

I think back to the pictures of myself at my college graduation and laugh, maybe a little cynically. There I was, smiling with my diploma like the whole world lay at my feet, when what was really going to lay at my feet were my children while I tried to go to the bathroom.

College definitely seems like another lifetime. My world as a stay-at-home mother of four in Texas is

drastically different than it was then. My roommates are a lot cuter but also a lot more likely to pee on the floor. Late nights are a thing of the past unless they involve someone wanting to use me as a pillow or a milk buffet. Sometimes, when I'm on my hands and knees scrubbing that dried applesauce off the floor or cleaning greasy handprints off my cabinets, I think to myself, *Wow, I'm so glad I got that philosophy degree. Plato's theory of forms is really coming in handy right now. Or, I'm sure glad I memorized over 200 reaction mechanisms in organic chemistry. I wish I could figure out the reaction mechanisms of my toddler.*

Whereas I once spent hours considering things like Thomas Aquinas' argument for the existence of God or the age-old debate of Calvinism vs. Arminianism, my brain is now mostly cluttered with the correct Tylenol dosage for a twenty-pound infant and an assortment of *Daniel Tiger* lyrics. I used to have an abundance of time to write and do pretty much whatever I wanted, and now, I'm lucky if I get a few minutes just to sit down and breathe.

It's not like motherhood was some kind of surprise detour. I'd always wanted to have kids. It was always part of the plan. But I don't know that I was totally prepared for the ways kids would change everything about my life. When I was a newlywed with zero children, I remember talking to a mom of six kids. She told me about how she was excited to get to go away to a

conference. “Honestly,” she said, “I just want to sleep the whole time.” She definitely seemed dead on her feet. She looked a little dazed. I felt naïve compassion and wondered ... *is it really that hard?*

The answer was yes. Yes, it is that hard, but I don’t know if I could truly have understood that then. I’m not sure anything could have *fully* prepared me for being a mom, but I do wonder sometimes if I could have been at least a little more prepared. While my education doesn’t always seem very relevant to being a mom, I don’t think it was a waste, and I have even found many parallels between the things I learned in school and the everyday life of motherhood. These overlaps have even led me to wonder, *What would a degree in motherhood look like? What should new, young moms know about the journey they’ve just begun and what on earth, if anything, does it have to do with Hume’s theory of causality that I pored over my junior year of college?* This book is the answer to these questions. It’s an entry-level course to get you ready for the hardest, messiest, most glorious job in the world.

Motherhood has stretched me and pushed me in so many ways. Currently, I’m seven years in, far from any kind of expertise or offers of a professorship, though I do feel like I have learned a few things. Motherhood has taught me so much about myself and about God. In this book, I have collected some of

those lessons. I've tried to give you big doses of Jesus along with some humor because—let's be honest—some days, the only thing that can help us tread the fine line between sanity and insanity is a good laugh at the regular absurdities of life with small children. I've tried to make it fairly short and, hopefully, sweet because I know you hardly have time to read it, just like I hardly had time to write it. Maybe we can't call it a motherhood degree, but perhaps a kind of crash course—one that will at least get you through your final exams.

So, class. Let's begin.

Math

Exponential Laundry, Divided Sleep,
Multiplied Love

When I was growing up, my mother, a former math teacher, emphatically told me that I was not allowed to hate math. I may have grumbled and complained through my nightly times tables worksheets, but I suppose I never actually hated it.

Later on, I somehow married a math nerd/statistics genius. His actual job is to use math and data to catch credit-card fraudsters. He fancies himself a detective ... a very nerdy detective. Needless to say, I am sure he will be telling our children the same thing that my mom told me. And I am sure that I will never hear the end of it from either of them if I don't include mathematics in our motherhood crash course. So, this is for them: let's begin with math.

I studied math all the way through calculus, even solving for the resultant volume found when rotating a bounded area about the x-axis, but most of that knowledge has been replaced by baby sign language

that I use for four weeks with each kid before quitting. I may only remember the basics of math, but I do remember enough to know that there are certainly some parallels between math and motherhood that might help us make sense of our daily lives as mothers.

Correlation, Variables, and Formulas

To my husband's shame, I never took a class in statistics, but he has explained one of its foundational concepts to me: correlation, or the relationship between things. One of the main goals of statistics is to use data to discover correlations in order to answer questions. For example, what correlation is there between age and the way people vote? What demographic of people is most likely to respond to ads for certain products? Or, what is the correlation between my listening to my husband talking about math and my head exploding? Because there definitely is one.

In motherhood, correlation is very important. Some things have positive correlations and others have negative correlations. Most of these correlations center around sleep. Did baby sleep all night? If yes, baby is happy and Mommy is happy: positive correlation.

But if baby woke up and refused to go back to sleep, baby is grumpy and Mommy is grumpy. My husband tells me this is actually still a positive correlation, but to me, it definitely feels negative.

I remember the first time my newborn son slept

for five consecutive hours overnight. Once upon a time, a mere five hours of sleep would have left me exhausted, but after a month with a newborn, I felt like a new person. I felt like I could conquer the world ... or at least clean the toilet. Maybe even get real jazzy and put on some mascara. Sleep is a major factor in the correlations of motherhood.

As you move past the newborn stage, though, things become a little more complex. If you can stretch your shrunken mom brain to hearken back to the days of algebra, you will remember that it was all about variables—factors that could alter the outcome of a problem. We memorized formulas. We spent countless hours solving for X , and while I may never use $y = mx + b$ in my everyday life, I'm sure I will be able to recite it on my deathbed.

In motherhood, one of the most important formulas to be aware of is the formula for “Hangry.” Take your child out to run errands. Forget to pack snacks. End up staying out past lunchtime. Add in a “no” to something they’ve asked for, and there you have it. Hangry. And if you want to get a little wild and crazy, start these errands when your child is already tired. Putting this into algebraic terms would look something like this:

$$H(t) = dt - e$$

Here, H is hangry, d is the toddler’s desire for something, t is the length of time it has been since they last

ate, and e is their emotional maturity. The variables may change, but the outcome is always the same: Hangry.

The hangry phenomenon should obviously be avoided at all costs. Once kids cross the hangry threshold, it is not pretty. As mothers, we spend ninety-two percent of our time juggling all these variables in order to maintain a reasonably happy outcome.

Multiplication and Exponential Growth

Mathematics also taught us all about multiplication, and that is, after all, what we are doing when we have children. We are multiplying ourselves, fulfilling that age-old creation mandate.

When my husband and I were dating, he told me he wanted a large family. At that moment, my heart fluttered because so did I. I'd always wanted a larger family like the four-kid family I'd grown up in, but it turns out, *large* is a vague and relative term because *large* to him, I found out within a few months, meant more like ten kids. Ten! I must have really been in love because I did not turn and run for the hills right then and there.

My husband has a pretty high tolerance for crazy, but now that we are a few kids in, I think even he has given up on his dream of enough kids for a five-on-five basketball scrimmage. We won't be getting a TLC reality show because when you continue to multiply yourself, you continue to multiply other things

too. You multiply the dishes, the chaos, the hangry meltdowns.

And the laundry! The laundry actually grows exponentially with the addition of each child. I'm really not sure if we can have any more kids simply because I'm not sure that I can manage any more laundry. Perhaps after you have a certain number of children, you come up with a new system, like each family member only gets to wear pants on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Or maybe everyone has to wear the same clothes at least two days in a row. Let's be honest. That happens sometimes anyway.

Love Multiplied

It's no doubt that when you become a mom, the equations in your life become a lot more complex. Multiplying ourselves seems to mean we add more laundry and stress, double our grocery budget, and divide our sleep in half. And time alone? That's basically in negative numbers. It's a lot to handle, but as we grow as mothers, we find that we can juggle more than we thought we could. We can survive and even thrive with less sleep. We can balance more variables. And while it's true that as we add more children we multiply the difficult things, we also multiply the blessings: the love, the joy, the fun. The more these little people grow, the more our hearts expand to take it all in.

Before my oldest child was born, he was an

abstract idea. Afterward, he became a concrete reality of projectile poop and middle-of-the-night scream sessions. Sleeping is one of my favorite things, and suddenly I was sleeping in one-hour stretches and nodding off during feedings. I remember taking my brand new baby to Walmart when he was a few weeks old and trudging around the store in a zombie-like haze. I was so tired that I thought I might fall asleep mid-step, right there in the frozen food aisle.

Of course, I loved him right away, but new motherhood kind of hit me upside the head like a ton of bricks. My world was completely shattered, and I struggled to accept how much my life now revolved around another totally helpless person.

Then one day, a few weeks into sleep deprivation, I was rocking my son. His eyes locked with mine, and he smiled at me. In that moment, I was what we call a “goner” and right then and there I fell completely in love. With each child, I have fallen in love all over again.

So there I was with this new little person added, sleep subtracted, and love multiplied. I remember almost feeling overcome by this big love. The thought that kept circulating through my mind was, *I've never been so certain I would die for someone*. I think we all hope that we'll be that courageous, selfless person who jumps in front of another to take the bullet, but we never know for sure unless we are put in that situation. When it comes to my kids, though, I just know.

I know I wouldn't hesitate, not for a moment, to give my life for theirs.

This is love. It's the great love Jesus spoke about in the Gospel of John, saying "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Motherhood is the closest I've come to understanding the love of God, and it's still only the faintest whisper. As sinful, selfish human beings, we fall short of practicing this great love daily, but when we have children, I think we get a little closer.

We are still only finite beings, so we can talk about the concept of infinity, or God's limitless love, but it is ever shrouded in mystery. By definition, infinite love is beyond our reach. I remember spending a lot of time in calculus class finding limits as X approached infinity: X was desperate to get there even though there is no *there*. You can't find the end of something that has no end. You can't fully understand something that goes on forever. The Bible tells us God's love is like that. Infinite. Incomprehensible. Unquantifiable.

Think back to the Garden of Eden. Only a few chapters into the Bible, things go terribly wrong there. God had created man and woman. He had created a luscious, beautiful paradise for them to live in. And He, God Himself, dwelled with them.

He had one rule—just *one*. They were allowed to eat from any tree except one—just *one*. It sounds simple enough. Risking death for a piece of fruit definitely

seems foolish to me. A juicy steak fresh off the grill? Maybe. But, of course, there was more to it than the fruit. It was the lie behind the fruit—the lie that God was not truly, infinitely loving and good. Adam and Eve chose to believe the lie. They chose to be disobedient children. Sin and death came on the scene.

How did God respond? He responded as the perfect Father. Perfectly merciful and just, He announced the due penalties for their sin and their upcoming departure from Eden and communion with Himself, yet He also announced His plan to get them back. He didn't curse them and walk away. He didn't wipe them out of existence and start over as He would have been perfectly justified in doing. He brought justice but also a glimmer of grace.

Listen for it as God spoke to the serpent. He said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Did you catch it? Did you hear the very first whisper of Jesus? Death had come to His children, and God declared His plan to take that death upon Himself on the cross. He didn't have to think about it. He didn't have to weigh his options and decide if they were worth it. No, although Adam and Eve were headed for death, Jesus stepped up and said, "I will take their place. I will pay the price that they may live."

In the greatest of inverse relationships, the less worthy of love they became, the more Jesus loved them. The Bible says this is how we know what love is: “that He laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).

The Burden of Love

Most of us have an innate sense that love is the most important force in the universe, but if we forsake its Source, we lack the ability to truly understand it. In movies or songs, love is usually made out to be a feeling or an emotional high, but as mothers, we know that love is made of much weightier stuff. Love is carefully cutting grapes into fourths. It's getting up five times a night or catching vomit in your hands. We know that to truly love someone can be a burden.

We have a vision for our children's lives. Things we hope they will learn and do along with things we hope they will not learn or do. We hope they won't repeat our mistakes, like wearing brightly patterned wind suits, or staying out late with friends instead of studying for their physics final, or dating the completely wrong person. We sometimes wish we had a time machine so that they could skip the unique and painful awkwardness of seventh grade. There are pitfalls and painful experiences we pray they will avoid, but we know that things will not work out according to our plans.

Inevitably, our children will encounter struggles.

They will make mistakes and get hurt. Others will hurt them. They will even hurt us. They could reject God just as Adam and Eve did that fateful day. Their lives could end early and so bring tragedy and sorrow to ours.

As C. S. Lewis said in *The Four Loves*, “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one.”¹ Love can be painful and costly because when we love, we open ourselves to the pain and grief of another. Their ache becomes our ache. Their loss becomes our loss. To love someone is to carry their burdens as your own. I was terrifyingly aware of this in those early years with my firstborn. I had never felt so completely vulnerable.

I can’t forget the first time I watched my son get his feelings hurt. He was about two-and-a-half. We were at a backyard cookout, and the older kids turned up their noses at him and told him he couldn’t play with them. He turned away a little sadly, but moved on quickly—I felt like my heart had been torn in two. If it hurt so much to watch that, how will I be able to handle watching him fail to make the football team or be rejected by a girl? Maybe I could arrange a marriage so he can skip the cycle of crushes and rejection to which I may or may not have devoted several high school diaries.

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Beloved Works of C.S. Lewis* (NY: Inspirational Press, 2004), 278-279.

When I became a mother, I felt this overwhelming love, this sense of excitement to see my son's life unfold, but right alongside it, this sense of fear. He seemed so small and the world so big. There were millions of ways it could all go wrong, millions of ways he could get hurt. I knew that meant I would hurt too.

At times I've wondered why God created mankind, knowing all along how humans would reject Him and the pain it would cause Him, how He would have to suffer for them. God wasn't surprised we chose sin. He knew. He knew it would hurt to love us. I can't pretend to know God's mind, but I think I understand it a little better now than I did before having kids. Even though I realize how loving my children could bring me pain, I know I would never want to erase their lives to avoid it. Knowing them and loving them is an unqualified good.

I think that's a little of how God feels about His children. He created us, not because He lacked anything or needed us, but because He wanted us—even knowing all the ways we would fail. God “does all that He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). It pleased Him to make us, and it pleased Him to save us. Burdened by love, He became the most vulnerable thing on earth: a baby. Though we rejected Him, He embraced pain and sorrow to save us. And His love for His children cost Him his life.

Having a child means we wade a little deeper into

that kind of love. The more children we add, the more it multiplies. Maybe we're knee-deep in laundry, and maybe our children have turned our once simple, straightforward lives into a complex math equation, but when we look at them, we know we're in this all the way. Whatever it takes, we pray we can love them as Christ has loved us, embracing the pain as well as the joy, counting the cost as well as the blessing.

Reflection Questions

- 1) This chapter describes God's relationship with Adam and Eve this way: "In the greatest of inverse relationships, the less worthy of love they became, the more Jesus loved them." Think of specific times and ways God has loved you when you were not worthy of love. Thank Him for His love.
- 2) Real love is costly, and sometimes hard. In what ways have you experienced this truth as a mother? What are specific ways you can take steps to better reflect God's love to your kids?
- 3) God chose to create mankind knowing exactly what it would cost Him to love us. Read Psalm 103:8-13 and Romans 5:6-8 and reflect on the perfect, limitless love of God for *you*.