

STARCK'S
MOTHERHOOD PRAYERS
for All Occasions

From the German Edition of Dr. F. Pieper

Translated and Edited

by

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Introduction

Pregnancy has its famously obvious symptoms and at least as many secrets. Behind the silly silhouette and the ice cream jokes every expectant mother hides visions more terrifying and glorious than she may have ever known. Her thoughts can be too extreme to inflict on the polite acquaintance or thoughtful family member who poses the perpetual question: “How are you feeling?”

But there is someone who truly wants to hear how sick you feel, how paralyzing your fear, how luminous your hope, how exultant your joy. And there is more than trite, everyday words to give voice to those fears and needs and thanksgiving: there is the Word of God Himself. That’s what this book is about.

Every mother wants impossibly huge things for her baby, and it is the joy of the Christian mother to bring those requests to God. When the swings from panic to exhilaration combined with the physical demands of carrying your baby leave you too exhausted to know how to start, the Motherhood Prayers are for you. They will teach you how to speak God’s own Word back to Him, which is the truest, most edifying prayer. They will comfort you as you pray them because they are saturated with that Word, which is God’s gift to us.

These prayers will challenge you. Prayer always includes confession, and pregnant sinners are sinners too. But God promises to hear, so use these words to let Him hear that you trust His promise to forgive. These prayers are profound and intense, which is language we’re not used to. But you’re also not used to loving someone as profoundly and intensely as you love the miraculous person whose tiny heart blinks beneath the thunderous beats of your own. These prayers come from a time uninformed by contemporary science. But science sometimes uncovers evidence surprisingly congruent with the mysticism of the past. These prayers are old, deep, and ponderous, while we live in a world that praises the novel, shallow, and cliché. But who better to trust with the new life within you than the Ancient of Days? So learn from these prayers, and by God’s grace your devotion and your baby will help each other grow.

Children are an inheritance from the Lord. Your baby is God’s good work in you no matter what your circumstances. “Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word,” confessed Mary, and in doing so she became the mother of God. Motherhood meant for her shame, scorn, danger, and loneliness, all of which were redeemed by her Son and Savior. So also does He redeem the crosses every faithful mother bears for her child.

In your time of trouble, God invites you to pray and be comforted. In your time of happiness, God invites you to pray, for He delights in your joy. And if you don't know how you could ever tell God everything that is in your heart, dear mother, the Motherhood Prayers are for you.

Rebekah Curtis
Mater vulgaris

PREFACE FROM STARCK'S PRAYER-BOOK

Johann Friedrich Starck was born October 10, 1680, at Hildesheim in Hanover. His father had formerly been a citizen of the old imperial city of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. After completing the regular course of studies at the Gymnasium at Hildesheim, young Starck entered the University of Giessen, where his inner life received permanent impressions in the devotional exercises which his theological teachers May and Lange conducted with a select company of students. After his graduation from the university, Starck had to wait a considerable time before he was called to a pastorate. This time he spent partly as assistant in the evangelical church at Geneva, where Reformed influence was dominant, partly as instructor in his ancestral home city of Frankfurt. In 1715 he was called to the pastorate of Sachsenhausen, and in 1723 he became pastor, first of the Barfuesserkirche, then of the Spitalkirche at Frankfurt. In 1742 he became a member of the Consistory and labored with unbroken strength as preacher, pastor, and author until a great age; he died July 17, 1756.

Starck's predecessor in Frankfurt had been Spener, "the father of Pietism," and it fell to Starck's lot to water what Spener had sowed. For thirty years he conducted "private" devotional exercises on Sunday afternoons. These exercises, which were attended by a number of earnest souls, were private only in as far as they were distinct from the regular public services at the church. At these exercises Starck endeavored to impress the evangelical truths of Christianity, the priceless privileges of the grace of Christ and the Christian ordinances, and the practical duties of a consistent Christian life on his individual hearers with true pastoral tact, and became to many a spiritual pedagogue and guide of great wisdom and power. Starck had a Savior's eye and heart for the lowly and forsaken, and sought them out for special instructions. For servants who could not attend the public services he wrote many an edifying tract; the poor and needy found in him not only a sympathetic adviser, but also a ready, unwearied, and generous helper.

Starck loved nothing sensational, nothing that was for mere display in matters of religion. Christian life, to him, was real and earnest, to be conducted in a sober mind. He was always bent on its practical applications to every pursuit and action, and on enlisting really the whole of a person in the service of the Master. While he maintained the confessional position of the Evangelical Lutehran Church, and rejoiced to be a member of it, his teaching was tinged with the peculiarities of the Pietistic tendency. To mention only one of these, the sharp line of demarcation between justification and sanctification which is seen in the writings of the apostle — that line which divides the gracious forgiveness of sin for Christ, an act exclusively of God, from the godly life which follows wherever the abso-

lution of the Gospel has been received by a penitent and believing heart – sometimes becomes faint in Starck’s writings. Thus what God alone does, and what the regenerate child of God does by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, are not always kept strictly apart. However, this defect occurs only occasionally, perhaps least in the Prayer-Book, and there are so many sections in Starck’s writings that are entirely free from error that Starck himself supplies the needed correction for his occasional deviations from the straight path of the sound doctrine.

When Dr. F. Pieper, years ago, examined the Prayer-Book with a view to applying, wherever needed, this self-correction of Starck, this was done with no sacrilegious hand, but really to secure for Starck a fuller reward of his faithful labors for a sincere and zealous Christian life. Dr. Pieper really helped Starck to speak his full Christian mind everywhere, and to discard what was of inferior value or even misleading in his presentation of Christian truths. The chief object, of course, was to secure the minds of less trained Christian readers against any false impressions which they might receive from an unclear rendering of the place of justification and not sanctification at the forefront of salvation.

The need, whether felt yet or not in our generation, to support and encourage women in their God-blessed vocation of procreation, promoted the reprint of these prayers. The first edition of *Starck’s Prayer-Book* contained these *Motherhood Prayers for all Occasions*. Emmanuel Press reprinted Starck’s 1921 English edition in its entirety in 2006. We have decided to release a special book, never before released as a separate volume, of the *Motherhood Prayers for all Occasions*. It is our hope that a compact size will encourage women to read these comforting devotions as they contemplate the mysteries of their participation in creation.

The translation is made from the German edition of Dr. Pieper of 1900. Comparison was possible to the translator only with the editions published by Kohler and the German Literary Board. Each of these editions has its distinct merit, the latter excelling by its faithful adherence to the original, its apt renderings, and happy paraphrases. Both renderings have proved helpful to the translator, though he decided to prepare an entirely new translation from the original, and even at the risk of being faulted with Germanisms permitted the peculiar style and thought connection of the original to be reflected in the translation. At times, too, the exact thought of the original required a return to Luther’s translation of the Bible. Nor has the use of texts from apocryphal books which Starck has used with power been altogether avoided. To guard against a misconception, the translator would state here that he does not regard these books as inspired, but, with Luther, considers some of the apocryphal books instructive reading.

The reproduction of Starck's poetry has been attempted, so far as the present translator is aware, in only one instance, and that with indifferent effect, as was to be expected. The poetry for the present edition has been gathered from many sources, not a few of them at the present time unknown to the editor; and though it lacks that direct connection with the meditative portions preceding which is seen in Starck's poetry, it is hoped that it may be found to possess value also independently of the particular sections to which it is found attached.

It was a luxury to spend many an hour in the company of a person on whom the spirit of prayer has been poured out in such abundant measure as on Starck. It was faith-confirming and inspiring work which the translator was permitted to do. He can offer no better wish to the readers of this book, now that it starts on its voyage to English homes and hearts in our church community, than this, that the light and strength, the cheer and comfort that has come to him out of the pages of this book in many a weary and despondent day may stream into the hearts of the readers, even though they be free, as the editor hopes they are, from all weariness and despondency.

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PREFACE.

What our faithful and kind God has promised to all believers, *viz.*, that He will protect, aid, and care for them, and hear their prayers, Christian women living in holy matrimony may expect from Him, especially at a time when God has blessed them and made them fruitful mothers. Nobody will ever disprove of the Psalmist's words, who says: "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is His reward." Godly women accept this statement, as can be seen by the example of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and other holy women, who, when they perceived that God had made them fruitful, praised Him for it with all their heart.

When godly women in their married life become aware of the blessing which God has accorded them, the ardent wish arises in their hearts that their hidden fruit may be ushered into the light of day unharmed and well formed. With their pious mind they turn to the Lord, confidently trusting that the almighty and kind Creator will hear their prayers. As the time of their delivery draws near, they increase the fervor of their prayers to Him who is able to do all things, and await His fatherly help. And when God has heard their prayer of faith, and they behold the healthy child to which they have given birth, they praise the gracious providence of their faithful God with heart and lips.

In this book Christian married women will find sufficient instruction (which, assuredly, they desire!) how they may conduct themselves in a true Christian spirit both during the time of their pregnancy and in childbirth. May the faithful God gladden with His blessing all godly hearts that call upon His all-embracing mercy in humble resignation, by hearing their prayers.

PRAYER.

O Jesus, by Thy holy birth Thou hast sanctified our sinful birth. Aid all those who call upon Thee in their hour of need with Thy mighty grace. Help them, refresh them, comfort them, gladden them. Come to them when human help is too feeble to aid them. Behold, their heart is sighing unto Thee, their lips are quivering, and their eyes are turned to Thy sanctuary. Speak to their heart the comforting assurance: "I am with thee in trouble, to deliver thee; fear not; I am at Thy side." Then they shall sound abroad Thy glory, and say: The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad; the name of the Lord be praised now and forevermore. Amen.

Meditations for Women with Child.

The Woman with Child at Her Morning Devotion.

EXHORTATION.

Every Christian, before going to his work in the morning, ought to commit himself to the gracious protection of God, and ought to pray God to keep his body and his soul under His sheltering mercy. It is certainly a great blessing of God when a person rises in good health in the morning, spends the day in good health with the aid of the most high God, and retires in good health at night. That this is a special blessing of God we realize when we observe that many a one has been well in the morning, but lies sick at eventide, or has met with misfortune during the day so that he had to be put to bed, lame, wounded, or with mangled limbs.

However, if every person ought to commit himself to the guardian care of God, how much more ought women expecting to become mothers do this! Every morning such women should diligently and eagerly call upon God (1) to keep them in holy and good thoughts throughout the day, that they may have their mind upon God, have Him always in their hearts, and hold converse with Him.

(2) They should also commend their life and limbs to God, asking Him to guard their steps and preserve them from a dangerous fall or other injury.

(3) Nor should they weary of commending the fruit of their womb to the holy providence of God, that it may grow, and become strong and well formed.

(4) However, in particular, they should be careful during the day not to become angry or involved in quarrel and strife. They should not be punctilious or easily offended, lest by their self-will and anger they bring misfortune, sickness, or even death upon their unborn child.

If they resign themselves thus to the goodness and mercy of God, they have the consolation that God will give His angel charge over them to keep them in all their ways.

MORNING PRAYER.

Lord God Father, what Thou hast created, Lord God Son, what Thou hast redeemed, Lord God Holy Spirit, what Thou hast sanctified, I commit to Thy hands. Praise, honor, glory, and thanks be to Thy holy name in this morning hour and forevermore. Amen.

O gracious, kind, and merciful God, who art Thyself the Light with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, I thank Thee from my inmost heart that Thou hast graciously kept me during this dark night and hast again permitted me to behold the gladdening light of morning. O Thou Light of my soul, shine into my heart this morning that I may be strengthened in love of Thee and in my confidence and hope. Sanctify my soul, that I may converse with Thee this day, have my mind on Thee, rejoice in Thee, and find comfort in Thy mercy.

Grant that I may not sin intentionally against Thee this day, but serve Thee and walk before Thee in the holiness and righteousness of the children of God. Make me to realize Thy most holy presence, and to be aware that Thou art about me all the time, hearing everything that I say, and seeing everything that I do, in order that by this consciousness I may be the more encouraged to persevere in holiness, and not to offend Thee.

I also commend to Thee my body and life, my walking about, my every step. O God of all goodness and grace, Thou hast now placed me in a peculiar state, in which I need Thy peculiar protection and aid. Therefore I humbly pray and beseech Thee, O Thou Protector of Thy children, to preserve my going out and my coming in. Let Thy mercy guide me; let Thy angel lead me by the hand, that I may not suffer some hurtful slip or fall by which I may injure a limb and at the same time the fruit of my womb. Guard me, strengthen me, preserve me. Drive far from me whatever is harmful to me. Let Thy good Spirit lead me in an even path. Let me live to see the evening under Thy protection, when I shall joyfully thank Thee again for all the benefits which Thou hast graciously shown me in body and soul.

The Lord bless me and keep me; the Lord make His face shine upon me, and be gracious unto me; the Lord lift up His countenance upon me, and give me peace. The mercy of the Father

protect me; the love of Jesus cover me; the succor of the Holy Spirit preserve me now and at all times.

If Thou dwell within me, Evil far must go, And I shall be tasting Bliss that angels know. Always in Thy keeping, Jesus Savior, dear, Whether waking, sleeping, Thine I am fore'er. Amen.

HYMN.

In all my ways, O God,
I would acknowledge Thee;
And seek to keep my heart and house
From all pollution free.

Where'er I have a tent,
An altar will I raise;
And thither my oblations bring
Of humble prayer and praise.

Could I my wish obtain,
My household, Lord, should be
Devoted to Thyself alone,
A nursery for Thee.

The Woman with Child at Her Evening Devotion.

EXHORTATION.

Oh, what a great favor it is when God permits a person to live through an entire day until the evening without a misfortune, and the person can retire to his rest, saying: I lay me down and sleep in perfect peace! What a glorious rest is his who retires at night in peace with God, in peace with his own conscience, in peace and comfort of body! Such a person can say to the praise of the Triune God: The Lord hath done great things for me, whereof I am glad. And when he falls asleep thus, with a grateful heart and the praise of God on his lips, the remainder of his nightly rest will also be blessed by God.

In the same manner, too, women with child should lift up their hearts, their eyes, and their lips to God when they have completed the day without misfortune. They should thank God for having graciously preserved and protected them, and should commend themselves to His love and mercy.