

Excerpt from *Mom Needs Chocolate*

By Debora M. Coty

Even Moses Started Out As a Basket Case

*“Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me, and don’t try to stop them! People who are like these children belong to God’s kingdom’” ([Matthew 19:14](#), CEV).*

“Now, how did he *do* that?” I asked my 22-month-old son’s empty stroller, the seatbelt buckled around . . . air.

“Matthew? Baby Houdini? The game’s over, come out!” I called softly, trying not to draw attention to myself as I looked under, around, and through the racks of blouses I had been perusing. I already felt out of place, having entered the mall’s most upscale boutique on a whim. It was a foreign land compared to my usual discount department store haunts.

I crawled to an adjoining display of evening dresses on my hands and knees. “Enough’s enough, Matthew,” I hissed through hair hanging over my face. “Get out of there right now!”

“May I help you, madam?” asked a silken voice from above.

“Uh—no, thanks. I’m just looking for something I’ve lost.”

“And what exactly might that be?” she cooed in a voice dripping with honey. “Perhaps I could be of assistance.” A nametag proclaiming *Ms. Hightower, Manager* (name changed to protect the uppity) dropped into my worms eye view on the lapel of the designer-suited woman as she attempted to lower herself to my level—as if that were possible.

I scrambled to my feet, tugging my sweatshirt over K-Mart jeans. “Well, it’s not exactly *something*, it’s more like *someone*—”

We were interrupted by a roar of laughter from a group of mall shoppers gathered at the store entrance, pointing to the large display window where mannequins were posed in various positions to display their finery. Drawing the most attention at the moment was the blonde seated on the floor with her arms raised in a gesture of frozen festivity. Colored stockings were stretched from the tip of each finger to form an intricate web of rainbow-hued hosiery extending to the ceiling.

There, seated in her statuesque lap, with his chubby little arm wrapped around her plastic neck, was my missing son. Giggling gleefully, Matthew smashed his cookie against her painted lips and jostled her curly wig over one glassy eye.

As I dove for the back of the display window, I glimpsed Ms. Hightower's pale face, her perfectly waxed eyebrows arching in horror, the faux blush on her cheeks distinct round splotches like strawberries in a bowl of cream.

The window's entrance was a sliding panel that was locked in place, leaving a space just wide enough for an inquisitive toddler to squeeze through. "Matthew, come to Mommy!" I called through the hole. His adoring audience guffawed as he poked his new friend and responded, "Ooh Mommy! Look—pretty lady!"

Realizing that a toddler with groupies was not going to be reasonable, I shoved my arm into the opening and groped blindly for my prodigal son. He and his fans only laughed harder as my flailing upper extremity assaulted the pretty lady, whacking her in the face and sending her blond wig flying.

As Matthew shifted positions, I lunged and managed to snag the toe of his sneaker. I began reeling him in inch by inch. Zing! Pang! Ptewie! The myriad of colored hose attached to the mannequin's fingers popped loose from the ceiling like rogue gunshots as Matthew dragged the petrified lady along for the ride, upending two other mannequins before I managed to wedge his squirming body through the narrow opening. Matthew emerged from battle clutching a plastic arm bearing the remnants of once-lovely stockings—like shredded flags after a war.

I hastily handed the dismembered appendage to an open-mouthed Ms. Hightower, muttered a mortified, "I'm so sorry," and fled the crime of the scene with Matthew howling in his get-away stroller.

I felt the fury roil inside like a pot about to boil over. "You're a *bad* boy, Matthew! How could you do this to me? You're a *bad, bad* boy!"

As I spat the angry words at my son, I suddenly realized how many times I, too, must've embarrassed my father—my Heavenly Father—that day by my bad behavior; those heated words with my husband over breakfast, cutting off that pushy driver, pocketing the extra dollar of change the clerk had mistakenly given me. But God loved me anyway. My poor choices didn't make me *bad* in God's eyes . . . only in need of forgiveness.

I stopped the stroller and got down on my knees, face to face with my sniffling toddler. "Mommy made a mistake, little buddy. You're not a *bad* boy. You just do naughty things sometimes. So do I. But we forgive and love each other anyway. Just like God does."

Prayer: Beloved Papa God, thank you for loving me unconditionally. Help me to teach by example your forgiveness and mercy to those you've entrusted to my care.