

Sara Wallace hands anxious mothers a heaping helping of grace that is seasoned with practical advice and one clear message: peace. Peace to a worn-out mother's heart—the kind of peace that can come only from Jesus himself. In fact, she shows us over and over again how our reliance on Christ doesn't mean that we try harder or work better but that we rest in his power to equip us for the job of motherhood. All mothers should read Sara's excellent book. Each of us needs this kind reminder to trust the Lord in this high calling that we are utterly ill-equipped to handle without his presence and help.

—**Melissa Edgington**, Blogger, *Your Mom Has a Blog*

As moms, we all care for our children. We were created to care. But sometimes that care can turn into anxiety. In *Created to Care*, Sara shows anxious moms the great care God has for them and their children. Through personal stories, insightful reflections, and the truth of God's Word, she points readers to the truth of who God is and what he has done, helping anxious moms to find peace in their sovereign God.

—**Christina Fox**, Speaker; Author, *Sufficient Hope: Gospel Meditations and Prayers for Moms*; Content Editor, *enCourage*

I have always been so grateful to read Sara's thoughts on motherhood. The gospel is the foundation for what it means to be a mother. It is always through this lens that Sara's wisdom comes shining into our everyday lives, where joining all the dots can be tricky. I'm excited about this latest release!

—**Kristyn Getty**, Soloist; Composer; Hymnwriter; Coauthor, *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church*

Created to Care invites moms to the “shalom” that their hearts desperately crave. Its Scripture-filled pages unfold the path that leads moms toward peace with God, peace within, and peace

with others—especially their husbands and children. This book is exceedingly practical and gospel-centered in its application.

—**Karen Hodge**, Coordinator of Women’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church in America; Coauthor, *Transformed: Life-taker to Life-giver* and *Life-giving Leadership*

Sara Wallace identifies the source of a young mom’s many anxieties, then gently points to the Creator who cares for *her*. Filled with humor, counsel, and gospel insight, *Created to Care* provides nuggets of sanity to strengthen the weary and calm the worried. Highly recommended!

—**Rondi Lauterbach**, Author, *Hungry: Learning to Feed Your Soul with Christ*

When there’s so much for us to fear—including our own shortcomings—*Created to Care* reaches out toward us fellow mom-travelers in kindness, pointing us over and over again to the all-sufficiency of the One who gently leads us.

—**Holly Mackle**, Editor, *Same Here, Sisterfriend: Mostly True Tales of Misadventures in Motherhood*

From day one of motherhood I have vacillated regularly between sinful control and crippling fear. I have long struggled to trust the Lord without feeling like I’m failing my children. In her book *Created to Care*, Sara Wallace not only shares these common mom struggles but also points us to the cure: entrusting both our mothering and our children to God’s sovereign care. Rather than telling us to do more or be better, Sara teaches us how to move from sin and fear in motherhood to trust and confidence in Christ. I can’t think of a mom who doesn’t need this book.

—**Glenna Marshall**, Author, *The Promise Is His Presence: Why God Is Always Enough*

Created to

CARE

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CARE

God's Truth for
Anxious Moms



SARA WALLACE

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Introduction

Wired for Worry

All I've ever wanted to do was be a mom. When I was little, I asked for a baby doll for every single birthday and Christmas. Every time I got a new doll, I would push it around in a stroller, feed it, change its clothes, and put it to bed. I even asked Jesus to please not come back before I got the chance to be a real mom.

But those baby dolls were a bit deceiving. They didn't wake me up in the middle of the night. They didn't leave me with postpartum depression. They didn't have huge diaper blowouts in the middle of church or make my hair fall out or give me mastitis. They never got sick or hurt. When I became a real mom, I found that real babies are a million times sweeter—and a million times more challenging.

How could motherhood be so wonderful and so hard at the same time, I wondered? It felt wrong to admit how hard it was. I felt like I was complaining or taking this beautiful gift for granted. I loved being a mom. I loved it so much it hurt. It gave me more joy than I could have imagined—but it also exposed the depths of my weaknesses and opened a whole new world of anxiety. I had the precious gift I had waited for all my life—and now I felt that I had to do everything I could to protect it.

Motherhood does strange things to us. Maybe you've heard the news stories that go around from time to time about moms who suddenly gain superhuman strength in order to protect their kids—stories about lifting up a three-thousand-pound car or jumping over an eight-foot wall. Science describes this phenomenon as a combination of adrenaline and pain-suppressing chemicals from the brain. We more commonly refer to it as the “Mama Bear” instinct.

God is the creator of the “Mama Bear” instinct. He uniquely fitted moms to be able to protect children. Unfortunately, it is hard to turn our “Mama Bear” instincts off. We think of thousands of ways our kids could get hurt and then try to prepare ourselves for every possible scenario. In the wee hours of the night when everyone else is asleep, we lie awake worrying about whether our kids had too much sugar, whether they're making enough friends, or whether there are any spiders in their beds.

On top of what could happen to our kids, we are also keenly aware of our own shortcomings. We envision the kind of dream childhood we want our kids to have, and then we see all the ways we might manage to mess it up. We are not the moms we think they deserve.

Do you see? Anxiety and motherhood are linked for a reason. God created us to care. But he created us to care within the context of *his* perfect wisdom and *his* perfect strength—not our own. He chose weak and broken vessels to accomplish this task so that he will get all the glory.

Author C. S. Lewis offers us a unique perspective on anxiety. He writes, “Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defect of faith. I don't agree at all. They are afflictions, not sins. Like all afflictions, they are, if we can so take them, our share in the Passion of Christ.”¹

Do you see the challenges of motherhood as a chance to

draw closer to God and to actually share in the sufferings of Christ? Anxiety is a sin when we give it a permanent residence in our hearts and allow it to rule our thoughts. But when we refuse to accept anxiety and instead engage in warfare against it, we bring great glory to God.

Are you ready to do battle with anxiety? You can find great strength and comfort for this battle—but only in the cross. My hope and my prayer is that this book will show you the way to that comfort—that even in this unpredictable season, you can know that God is for you. And I pray that in your darkest moments of uncertainty, you will catch a glimpse of glory that will take your breath away.

Part 1

Committing Your
Motherhood to God



1

Peace for Mom Guilt

Last week I came into the living room and found my four-year-old lying perfectly still, flat on his face. I was startled.

“Honey, what are you doing?” I asked.

The muffled voice from the carpet said, “Playing with my toys.”

I stared at him, confused. I didn’t see any toys, and he certainly didn’t look like he was playing. “What toys?”

My son shifted his body slightly so I could see under his stomach. I saw two plastic snakes, three playing cards, and a Lego man peeking out. His current favorite toys.

“Why are you lying on them?” I asked.

He turned his head to face me. “I don’t want anything to happen to them.”

I tried to process the situation. “You’re protecting your toys so you can play with them . . . but you’re not playing with them. Are you having fun?”

“Yes,” came the automatic response. Obviously, he was not.

I didn’t understand. My son loved these toys, but he couldn’t enjoy them. He couldn’t bear the idea that something might happen to them (or that a brother might dare to touch them).

He would rather lie facedown on the carpet than play with them.

I had to laugh at the ridiculousness of it. He looked so miserable. Something that was supposed to bring him joy was paralyzing him.

I have an embarrassing confession to make: that's exactly the way I sometimes feel about motherhood. I love being a mom so much, and yet it terrifies me at the same time. I suffocate my own joy by holding on too tightly. It's as ironic as my four-year-old lying on top of his favorite toys.

Does anxiety keep you from enjoying this beautiful gift of motherhood? Perhaps you have prayed, waited, and prepared to be a mom, and now you're paralyzed by the thought that something bad could happen. Or maybe motherhood caught you by surprise, and you don't feel equipped for this unexpected blessing.

We know our sin and our weakness better than anyone else. And yet God chose to entrust us with the precious gift of children. As we bask in the glorious mercy of this thought, a nagging fear creeps in: *Can I handle this? What if I mess it up?*

Before you became a mom, perhaps the consequences of your actions didn't seem so big. They usually only affected you. But now everything you do affects your kids. *Everything*—whether it's good or bad. How do you know if you're doing the right thing at any given moment? How can you protect your kids from your own weakness, incompetence, and flat-out sin?

Accepting Our Imperfection

Recently I got a sweet message from another mom. She loves her children dearly and is constantly haunted by the idea that she will mess things up for them. "I know that God can forgive me," she wrote. "But I also know that sin has consequences.

I'm afraid of what consequences my children will have to live with because I'm a sinful person."

I can relate. I know how it feels to see the hurt in my son's eyes when I speak harshly. I know what it's like to ruin everyone's fun on a family outing because I let my own stress take over. There are nights when I fall into bed with an aching heart, wishing my kids had a perfect mommy.

But they don't. And, as much as we strive to put our sin to death, there is nothing we can do to change the facts: we are sinners, and we will remain sinners until the day we are with Jesus. We will fail our children. They will live with the consequences of our sin. And you know what? *They* will be sinful parents, too. Their kids will suffer the consequences of *their* actions.

Does that sound depressing? Maybe. But, in a way, it is also freeing. Whenever I went shopping with my mom as a kid, we would listen to Elisabeth Elliot cassette tapes in the car. One of Elisabeth's favorite quotes was "In acceptance lies peace." Peace doesn't necessarily come when our circumstances change; it comes when we accept our circumstances the way they are. Does that mean we accept our sin? Yes—we accept the *fact* that we are sinners and remember that Jesus came only to save sinners (see Mark 2:17). There is peace when we stop fighting against the fact that we are sinners and say instead, "I am the one Jesus died for. Yes, I am a sinner; but I am forgiven."

Once we accept our problem, we are free to accept the solution. We know that our kids will grow up in a sinful world with sinful parents and that they will need the same solution that we do.

Accepting Christ's Perfection

When I was fourteen, a woman from my church gave a message to all the girls in the youth group. I sat in the front row and

watched as she held up first a dirty old bathrobe and then her handmade wedding dress. Each handsewn bead sparkled. The girls were spellbound as she explained how Jesus removes our filthy rags and makes us his spotless bride. It was like taking off the old bathrobe and putting on a costly wedding gown. That was the first time I had ever heard the term “imputed righteousness.” I knew that Jesus took my sin, but I didn’t fully grasp what I got in its place: his perfect righteousness.

What does this mean for Christian mommies? It means that when God looks at us he sees his Son. Even on the bad days? On *all* the days. So often, I feel like a mess—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I feel like the sentence “It’s been one of those days” is stamped on my forehead. But God sees something else. He sees a heart that is washed white as snow—a beautiful bride waiting for him to return.

Several years after that youth group talk, I came across the verse that gives the same illustration: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD . . . for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10).

These “garments of salvation” aren’t something we have to put on every day. We are already wearing them. We didn’t clothe ourselves; we *have been* clothed by God.

God’s Part, Our Part

How do these righteous robes affect our daily motherhood? God sees his Son in me—but how does that silence the mom guilt? When we see ourselves clothed in Christ’s righteousness, we have fresh confidence to do what God has called us to do. We

know that he is working through us for his glory and that he will forgive us when we fail.

Connecting our theology to our daily lives doesn't always come naturally. As busy moms, we often experience a disconnect between the spiritual and the physical. Our salvation is "out there"—but the screaming baby is right in front of us. It's hard for us to meditate on eternity with Jesus when we can't see past the diapers and dishes.

We know God takes care of the "big stuff," but it's our own failure that scares us the most. We think, *Whatever God is in control of I can trust him with. But if it's in my control, I know I'll mess it up.* I want to encourage you: there is no separation between God's part and our part. It's *all* God's part. He is in control of every part of our motherhood—including us.

Yesterday I was running errands with the kids, and I turned on a sermon by one of my all-time favorite preachers: my dad. I just about slammed on the brakes when he said, "Our sins do not hinder [God's] good, eternal, sovereign purposes for you; they are part of it."¹ Amen! What kind of God can use even our sin to bring about good? What kind of grace is that? It's a grace that we don't understand. But we revel in it—and we say, "Thank you, God." I am responsible for my actions—good and bad. And God has a perfect plan for my actions—good and bad. We don't have to understand it in order to accept it—and to take great comfort from it.

I was getting my two-year-old dressed last week and marveling at his big blue eyes and his tuft of blond fluff. I thanked God for giving him to me. But I rarely (or maybe never) thank God for giving *me* to my son. Just as God picked my son for me, he picked me for my son. God chose to use me in this calling for his glory. He is working through me. When my personal insecurity nags at my heart, I can remind myself, *I have been chosen*

by God for this task. He will not leave me alone. I am forgiven. I am new. God made me a mom for his own glory.

I first heard the word *deism* in a philosophy class in college. Deism teaches that God set the world in motion and then stepped back to let it run its course without him. Not only is this a depressing thought, it is also unbiblical. Our Creator is intimately acquainted with all our ways (see Ps. 139:3). He is the one who started the good work in us, and he has promised to complete it (see Phil. 1:6). He is walking with us every step of the way.

So often we live our lives as if God has said, “I saved you—now, you live out your life here the best you can and I’ll see you on the other side.” Paul calls this foolishness: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3). God did not leave us on our own to finish what he started.

If we apply this idea to our own motherhood, it’s like telling our kids, “I gave birth to you—now, you go do your thing and I’ll do mine. Maybe I’ll see you around some day.” Don’t we long to hold our kids’ hands and see them through every twist and turn of their journey through childhood? That is how God deals with us, as well.

We need to mend this harmful disconnect—the idea that God handles the big stuff and we handle the rest. There is no better remedy for this than Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” God gives us everything we need for this life. The proof? He already gave us his son.

Do you believe that God is working through you? Or do you feel like he is too far away or you are too broken? You are not just filling marching orders each day, hoping that you’ll mess up a little less than the day before. You are an ambassador

for Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:20). God is showing your children the gospel *through* you—and your brokenness is part of it. Let’s explore how.

Not-So-Perfect Moms Share the Gospel

My kids are constantly “camping” in the house. They gather up all the lanterns and flashlights and run to the darkest place they can find (usually my closet). They head for the dark because they want their lanterns to shine brighter. In the same way, God uses our weaknesses to make his glory shine brighter. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul says, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (NASB). God gets all the glory.

I can talk to my kids about God’s forgiveness all day long. But showing them his forgiveness is different. When I repent in front of my kids, I take their hands and lead them to the cross. I show them the well-worn path I have walked many times. I point out my footprints for them to put their own feet in. I say, “This is where we go. This is the only path to forgiveness.” I show them that glorious place where, in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian’s burden rolled off his back and he exclaimed, “Ah, what a place is this! . . . Blessed cross! Blessed tomb! Nay, blessed is the Lord that was put to shame for me!”² One day, when my children recognize their sin, they will know where to go. They will remember.

Can you see how our sin is part of God’s plan? God is glorified through the journey, not just at the destination. Our sin, suffering, and pain are all part of the journey. All of it points to the gospel—including our broken motherhood.

When we mess up, in both big and small ways, we can come alongside our kids and say, “We are all in this together. We are all sinners in need of a Savior.” We seek our kids’ forgiveness

and God's forgiveness. We aren't perfect, and they won't be perfect either. We have to show them how to deal with their imperfections.

Maybe you think that your sin is too big for God to handle—that he can accomplish something good only with perfect people. Paul tells us the exact opposite: “And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor. 12:9 NASB).

Wait. Are we supposed to actually be *happy* about our weaknesses? Look at Paul's mixed reaction when he was smacked in the face by his sin: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24–25) This same thankfulness that Paul displayed renews our own confidence for the task ahead. We have been delivered. And now we have a job to do.

Unrealistic Expectations

Speaking of jobs, have you seen the meme floating around on social media that describes a mom's job? It usually says something like “Don't tell me I don't have a job. I'm a doctor, nutritionist, chauffeur, chef, teacher, maid, accountant, counselor, project manager, and personal trainer.”

The only problem is that we are *not* all of those things. We are simply women who love our babies. *None* of us could fill that kind of a job description.

When I was in school I was terrible at science. It never clicked for me. I scraped by with a passing grade, but I have accepted the fact that I will never speak periodic table. When I became a mom, suddenly I felt like I was expected to be a scientist. I was supposed to know the thousands of ingredients that were

in each thing my child could possibly eat, how the ingredients would interact with each other, which nutritional elements my child should have at what age and in what quantities, when to choose homeopathic remedies and when to use modern medicine. I was a wreck.

But my expectations were crazy. Unrealistic expectations create a vicious cycle of anxiety. The only way to break the cycle is to apply God's truth directly to our expectations. What do we expect from ourselves as moms, and what does God expect from us? Let's compare job descriptions.

Our Expectations	God's Expectations
Feed my child perfect food. Never let my child get hurt. Give my child a perfect home environment. Never sin in front of my child. Give my child perfect friends. Answer all my child's questions accurately and patiently. Make every vacation scrapbook-worthy. Make every party Pinterest-worthy.	Train up a child in the way he should go (Prov. 22:6). Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Work heartily, as for the Lord (Col. 3:23). Be faithful in the little things (see Matt. 25:21).

What differences do you notice? We get tripped up by the details, but God shows us the big picture—the end goal. To “train up a child in the way he should go” means to show our kids the gospel. Point the way to Christ over and over. We

complicate things by placing expectations on ourselves that distract us from the purpose of motherhood. When we take a step back and refocus on the big picture, the details that cause us anxiety fade into the background. Suddenly we see our kids' hearts. We're reminded of what's important.

You can see how God's expectations allow for many different personality types among moms. You don't have to be good at everything. You don't have to know everything. You can point your kids to Christ whether you're a working mom or a stay-at-home mom, whether you're a college grad or a high-school dropout, whether you were raised in a Christian home or became a Christian later in life. When you start to feel the panic of not knowing how to do everything "right" for your kids, remind yourself of your simple goal: Seek first God's kingdom. Look for ways to show your kids the gospel.

This should bring so much relief to us moms. Show my kids the gospel? Yes, I can do that. Imperfectly, of course—but as we've already seen, our imperfections are part of the gospel story. We are imperfect mommies raising imperfect kids in an imperfect world. There are so many things we *don't* know, but we can cling to what we *do* know: Jesus died for sinners. Can I give my child a perfect diet? No. Can I teach him about Jesus? Yes. Big sigh of relief.

Take one more look at the expectations chart. We could fail every single one of our own expectations on the left and still fulfill God's expectations. Yep—even when we sin. And some family vacations stink. Some birthday parties are a hot mess. It doesn't mean we are failing as moms. Everything we experience with our kids, good and bad, can be part of "training them up" in the gospel.

Past, Present, and Future Comfort

A good friend in college confided in me that she was nervous about having kids one day. “I don’t know what a good mom looks like,” she said. She didn’t come from a Christian home, and she herself didn’t become a Christian until she was an adult. She already felt guilty for letting her kids down, and she didn’t even have kids yet.

The hope for a mom from a non-Christian home is the same as for a mom from a Christian home: We are forgiven in Christ. We are a “new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). We have all been saved from the same dead state by the same perfect righteousness.

The disciple Peter had a messed-up track record. He denied Christ, gave in to peer pressure, and set his heart on earthly things. But he belonged to Christ. Before Peter’s greatest betrayal, Christ gave him a special charge that must have echoed in his heart for the rest of his life: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).

Christ knows that we, like Peter, will fail. But he also knows that our faith will go on. It will experience the painful flames of refining, but, in the end, it will come forth as gold. And as failed, redeemed mamas, we are called to turn and strengthen one another. Know that every mom, no matter her past, is afraid of failing her kids. When your past threatens to steal your joy, find another mom to encourage. Tell her, “We are in this together. We were dead, and now we’re alive—and our kids are going to know it.” This is where we see the beauty of the body of Christ. Dive into your local church. Seek out moms whom you trust and admire. You are not alone.

Do you believe that God made you a mom on purpose? Do

you believe that he put your kids in your home for a reason? If you do, then you must believe that he already knew what he was working with: a flawed mommy. Not only did he know, but he has worked your sin into the equation from the beginning. God has no Plan B. He didn't say, "Well, I need a perfect mom for this job, but you'll have to do." He chose you for your kids and your kids for you—all for his glory.

Satan does not want us to be confident. He wants us to constantly wallow in our weaknesses and insecurities so we won't show our kids the glory of Christ. I love Martin Luther's response to this: "When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: 'I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? . . . For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also.'"³

We can accept all our inadequacies with confidence, because we've been forgiven. Our strength comes from Christ, not from ourselves. Give your insecurities to Christ. Fix your eyes on Christ in whatever he calls you to do today, and let your kids' eyes follow your gaze.

What Other Moms Are Saying

In our weakest moments of motherhood, we long to hear a voice say, "Me too!" There is comfort in knowing that we are not alone—that other moms understand the unique struggles of this season. I've been blessed to be surrounded by wise, godly mamas at every stage of my motherhood journey. At the end of each chapter, in this "What Other Moms Are Saying" section, we will have the privilege of hearing from many of these women. Some of these women I have known since grade school, when we would daydream about what it would be like to be

moms and what we wanted to name our kids. Others I've met in church, at college, or through my blog. Each one has poured into my motherhood in a special way. I love the variety of perspectives they offer. I hope you will, too. Let's listen in to how other moms from all walks of life find peace in the chaos.

I am most overwhelmed when my focus is on myself. I am most equipped to be the mom I want to be when my focus is on Christ. (Rebecca)

When my husband started med school and I was on my own with the kids, another mom encouraged me to start praying more. At first I rolled my eyes—but I felt convicted about it, so I took her advice. WOW! I instantly saw a difference in my personal insecurities. I can now tell when my prayer life is lacking by how strong my personal insecurities are. (Carrie)

I think what would've helped me in my first years was for someone to just remind me that Christ is the perfect parent on my behalf and that no matter how I mess up, he alone can save my kids. (Katie)

When insecurity starts to take over, I blast worship music. My kids love it, and it helps me refocus. It's hard to grumble while singing praise. (Melissa)

I try to remember that God saw fit to make me my kids' mother and that now my kids are my mission field because God has *sent* me to them. (Jori)

When I lean on my own skills and knowledge, I stumble. That's when I remember to acknowledge *him* in all my ways (see Prov. 3:6). (Christy)

It really helps me to just have honest conversations with the Lord in which I admit all the ways I'm struggling. Something like, "Lord, I am really struggling with not getting frustrated when my daughter whines. Please give me wisdom in my parenting and honor my sincere efforts to raise her in your love and truth." (Rebecca)

When I had my twins, I was completely overwhelmed by personal insecurity. That's when I fell in love with Psalm 56:9: "This I know, that God is for me." If a believer truly believes that, they can face anything. (Andrea)

Reflection

1. What are some unrealistic expectations you place on yourself that lead to insecurity?
2. What do you think Paul meant when he said, in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "When I am weak, then I am strong"? For more context, read verses 9-11 as well.
3. Look at the first part of Isaiah 50:9: "Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?" How could this verse bring you comfort when you feel the "mom guilt" creeping in?
4. Look again at Luke 22:32: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Can you think of a time in your life when you were able to use your failure as an opportunity to point someone else to Christ?
5. Do you know a mom who struggles with insecurity in motherhood? How could you encourage her today?