The Mothering Mindset

How To Be A Mom Without  
Losing Your Mind



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Dedicated to the moms who need a break, help, or time away.

“Come unto me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

―MATTHEW 11:28-30

The mothering mindset



How To Be A Mom Without Losing Your Mind

Not long ago, I was finishing up a master’s degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. During that time, I began teaching mornings at a local elementary school and teaching Mexican migrant farm workers in the evenings. It was cool except it wasn’t the real desire of my heart. Although I had an eight-year-old son, I was pretty much obsessed with wanting more children. Maybe my longing was fueled by my sense that God really did want me to have more kids. It was as if I had a vision for it.

For eight years*,* I did every medical procedure I could morally justify. Finally, the day came when a woman called me from a crisis pregnancy ministry in a nearby city. She said that there was a birth-mom who needed an adoptive family for her baby. She said that she was especially interested in us because this birth mom wanted to place her baby in a family with a son. She wanted her baby to have an older brother. “When is she due,” I asked.

“Saturday,” the woman responded.

Actually, Lily was born that Thursday, and she was home with us on Saturday. She didn’t sleep for more than two hours at a time, and she didn’t keep down her formula, but I didn’t care. I was psyched! I ended up quitting the coveted morning job. It didn’t matter because I was so thrilled. My son, David, said, “We’ve been praying for more kids for my whole life, and now God answered our prayers.” That’s how it seemed to him. And the family of God celebrated with us for that whole season.

By fall, I was getting a little tired of the crying and the puking, which she was doing most of the time. Lily wouldn’t nap anywhere but in her own bed and then only for twenty minutes. She got up twice in the night and woke in the morning at 5:30 or 6:00. Eventually, I had to quit my evening job with the migrant workers.

Want to know what my husband’s response to all this was? Karl said, “Hey don’t be upset. Just enjoy the baby.”

Translation: “It’s okay that you don’t get to go out of the house. This is what you said you wanted. Don’t complain.”

What I didn’t know then was that Lily had a myriad of psychological issues, like sensory integration disorders, ADHD, and auditory processing disorder—lots of autism-spectrum-type issues. I didn’t know for sure it was autism, but I suspected it.

So, you know what happened next, right? I found out that I was eight weeks pregnant after ten years of infertility. Can you believe it? I was already tired all the time, and my stomach was pretty upset from sheer nerves. I had no idea.

You know what I did next? I panicked. You see, I was already sort of at my wit’s end. The pregnancy was considered high risk because I had miscarried previously, so the doctor said that I should stay off my feet. I installed baby gates in the doorways of our dining room to make it a giant playpen filled with toys for my toddler. I sat with her on the floor while we played together. Those were long days. I didn’t get out much.

Toward the end of the pregnancy, when my husband and I met with the childbirth coach about childbirth classes, I told her that I wasn’t nervous about childbirth; I was nervous about parenting. There was never anyone who wanted to rise to the occasion more than I did. It was just that I wasn’t that brave. The babies required more than I possessed—more stamina, more patience, more flexibility, more grace.

Soon, our Gracie was born, and there I was the mother of three, with two in diapers. It was like working the church nursery all day and all night—seven days a week. It’s no wonder I dreaded seeing my husband leave for work in the morning. Small children make it so that you don’t have solitude or fellowship; you just have babies. (Sounds terrible, I know.)

Additionally, my pride made it difficult for me to be pruned back. I was no longer able to do the things I used to be good at. I couldn’t believe the words coming out of my mouth when asked by others to do those things: “No, I can’t help with the retreat.” “No, I can’t decorate for the banquet.” “No, I can’t teach the course.”

My babies made it so that I couldn’t accomplish much outside my home. In fact, I couldn’t accomplish everything that needed to be done inside my house! The laundry alone was bigger than Mount Everest. Sorting baby clothes became a fulltime job.

As far as connecting with other mommies was concerned, most of my peers had gone back to work, and neither Karl’s nor my family lived near us. Of course, David wasn’t old enough to babysit. As a matter of fact, he still needed a mother. At one point, he asked, “Do you think we’ll ever eat regular food again?” We ate Sam’s frozen everything. Each night at dinner, by the time I got the babies settled, the food was cold, and I would have to get up repeatedly to tend to someone during the meal.

Maybe at this point you’re saying, “Well, of course, all mothers have to do that.” And you’re right. My problem was I just wasn’t prepared for it. It seemed like I couldn’t even get a haircut without an event planner. My roots were gray. I was desperate. I was also a little ashamed. I mean, mothers are supposed to be grateful and loving, right? When my husband called to ask me if I needed him to pick something up on his way home from work, I replied, “Airline tickets.” That was my emotional state.

Sometimes, the thing you’re called to do is beyond your capabilities. What do you do when God calls you to be faithful to a calling that’s way beyond you? What do you do when your ship comes in and it requires way more of you than you ever imagined? If you’re like me, you say, “I’m not cut out for this.”

I ended up crying out to God, “Lord, You have to help me! I need for You to show me how to do this.” My lack of peace and joy scared both me and my husband.

Little by little, though, the voice of the Lord began to comfort me. He began to reveal His heart, His love, and His nature to me as I had my hands full, fuller than they’d ever been.

My problem was that I needed to know better how to nurture my kids, and do you know what I learned? I learned that, first, I needed to be nurtured myself.

Jesus Is The Best Nurturer

When I looked for a model in Scripture—a model of being a faithful, industrious, dutiful mother—I discovered lots of people who did exploits. But there weren’t many who were famous for being good at menial tasks, like diapers, especially the women. I mean, Deborah, when she wasn’t leading generals into battle, sat under a tree and arbitrated and mediated. Esther did her beauty queen routine. Lydia sold elegant clothing. Martha did housework, which made her bad-tempered, by the way.

And there wasn’t any anointed laundry mistress. Just saying.

I found that Jesus Himself was the best model for what I needed. Here’s the specific passage of Scripture that revolutionized my thinking:

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. Then … because they did not have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6:30-32)

Jesus Encourages And Listens   
To His Children

“Come away and rest.” That’s what Jesus said. He is so maternal!

Jesus received His disciples back like kids getting off the school bus. “How was your day? How did it go?” That sounds just like a mom. I want to hear what happened to my kids while they were at school, how they felt, and what they thought. That’s what Jesus was doing.

The fact is, Jesus didn’t need to hear the report. He knew the details already. He’s God, after all. He just wanted to hear them tell it, and to share in their enthusiasm and in their success. That’s how mothers are: encouraging, affirming, voting for you.

Jesus Cares For The Needs   
Of His Children

Jesus cared that His disciples would have time to rest and eat after their ministry, so he cares that I, too, would find time to rest and eat after doing my ministry to my little group of heathen. He’s not condemning me. He’s giving me permission—permission even to nap!

Jesus Models Compassion And Faith   
To His Children

And if that isn’t amazing enough, Jesus decided for His disciples and Him to go away “by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” Here, we have a scriptural mandate to go on a cruise! Well, maybe New Testament scholars would see it differently, but I’m blessed that the Prince of Peace isn’t against my need for leisure and food. Someone once told me that life is like chopping wood and sometimes the most productive use of your time is to “sharpen your axe.” Sometimes, rest is sharpening your axe.

Women can get caught in this mythological expectation of our giving birth, tending to the older children, advancing our careers, breastfeeding, launching businesses, volunteering, decorating, hitting the gym, “eating clean,” and being sexy wives all in the same season. This expectation is frustrating and depressing. You will rise again in all these areas, just maybe not this week.

Rest in Greek is *anapauo.* *Pauo* means to cease, to give rest, and *ana* means again. In other words, we need to rest again and again. We have Christ’s permission to rest, not only when we’re tired, but also when He beckons us, “Come to Me, weary one, and rest again.”

Returning to Mark 6, we read:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (v. 34)

Here, Jesus modeled compassion for His disciples by tending to the needs of the needy. So, we too, as mothers, when we tend to babies, our sheep, are modeling for our other children and for the rest of the world that babies need tender, respectful care. It’s not something to be apologetic about, and it certainly is nothing to feel guilty about. Caring for small children is very important, God-honoring work.

Jesus Instructs His Children   
In Practical Matters

Back to the scene in Mark, it was late in the day,

so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” (6:35-37)

Then, the disciples said to each other, “Let’s order pizza!” No, just kidding. Actually, as you may remember, Jesus sends them into the crowd to see what food is available. Voila! Five loaves and two fish.

Jesus then directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. And so, they did, sitting in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up into heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves.

Next, Jesus gave the food to His disciples to set before the people. He had His guys do the actual work of handing out the multiplying bread and fish. Scripture says that they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and fish. By the way, five thousand men were fed that day.

Jesus calmly organized the task, organized His people, gave thanks, instructed His guys, and got the meal served and cleaned up. It all sounds like Vacation Bible School without the craft, doesn’t it? As it turns out, Jesus is the best nurturer, caregiver, teacher.

Jesus Inspires and Empowers   
His Children

The voice of the Lord affirms our humanity. The voice of our condemning enemy—or indeed the “internal Pharaoh”—doesn’t care about your personal needs. You know what the Pharaoh said? He said to the Hebrews, “Make more bricks without straw.”

The voice in our heads lies to us and tells us longer, more, higher, faster, bigger, better. It’s never good enough, no matter how much you produce. The nurturing voice of the Holy Spirit wants relationship, not merely productivity for its own sake.

As we learn what’s balanced and reasonable, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we teach this principle to our children and indeed to ourselves. As mothers, we model for our children the need for rest, work, fun, and worship. We must instruct and model balance.

As a mother, I can be encouraged to receive permission to rest and eat, to tend to my own needs, and then to be like Jesus is His ability to gently tend to the needs of others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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