

It's Okay to Hide in the Bathroom

**The Overwhelmed Mom's Guide to Enjoying
Motherhood**

Copyright © 2016 by Heidi Cooper
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned,
or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission.
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: **978-1534931848**

It's Okay to Hide in the Bathroom

**The Overwhelmed Mom's Guide to Enjoying
Motherhood**

By Heidi Cooper

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	9
Ten Second Fixes.....	13
Ten Minute Fixes.....	27
Love Your Children.....	39
Know thyself.....	49
Know thy children.....	59
The Time and Space Continuum.....	67
Creating Memories.....	83
A Solid Foundation.....	97
Think Long Term.....	109
Quick Reference.....	115
Bibliography.....	119
About the Author.....	121

For my mom

She showed up everyday and did her very best to raise us and give us a good example of what a mother is.

She is always learning and exploring new ideas.

She is my close friend and confidante.

She loves YHVH, our Heavenly Father.

She is the most awesome editor. She not only helped me with the ideas and concepts in this book, but she found every place where I missed a hyphen.

I love you!

` Heidi ♥

Introduction

It's hard to believe that my oldest daughter is all grown up with little babies of her own. I am so proud of you. I totally remember when you and your sister were little. You weren't even two at the time and she was just a baby. You actually pulled her bed right off the bench onto the floor, with her in it! You two would get each other screaming right when I was trying to fix dinner. It seemed that the only viable option was for me to scream right along with you. So, we had this daily scream fest every afternoon. I thought I was going insane. I couldn't seem to settle you down, and dinner had to be prepared. Arghhhh!

I know you will have days like that, or even months! I want to encourage you that it won't always be this way. You probably don't believe me, but it's true. I survived and I know you will, too.

Since I'm an author, I thought I'd write you a book about motherhood. You see, most moms want to be better moms. But either there isn't any information available, or they are afraid to ask for help. I want you to succeed, so I'll write down all my best stuff and hand it to you. Then you don't have to get frustrated looking for help, or refuse to ask at all. You can read it in the bathroom when you're trying to escape from the little monsters that are taking over your house. You guys always joked that the bathroom was my favorite room in the house. Sometimes, I would go in there and just enjoy the quiet for a couple of minutes, until someone would burst in yelling, "Mommmy!" Even your dad didn't completely understand my trips to the bathroom, because he was always asking, "Where's your mother?" So, the bathroom isn't the perfect place to hide, but it gave me that tiny bit of breathing room to be able to head back into the trenches of motherhood and go another round.

I'm sure you'll find a special place where you can breathe for a minute and regroup. It's important to have a little downtime when you can. But, I want you to do more than just survive the next wave. I want you to really enjoy being a mom. I want you to delight in your children's hugs and kisses. I want you to feel good about your parenting skills. It took me a while to get there, but I hope I can help you find that mothering sweet spot a little sooner. Don't worry, you can still hide in the bathroom! I do. I love being a mom, but I still enjoy hiding in the bathroom for a few minutes to read a page or two in a book, or pray. It's a good thing.

I'll give you a peek at some of my secrets in a minute, but first, I want you to feel free to share this book with other moms. I'm writing it to you, but the things I have learned over the years would be helpful to any mom trying to make it through the day with their little ones. Some of them might be so overwhelmed that the idea of having more kids is akin to jumping out of a plane. I think we should value each life, and I want people to have children and love them. I don't want moms to be scared of their kids and declaring, "I AM SO DONE!" So, pass this book around.

I'm not sure exactly where you are as a mom right now, so I'm going to assume worst case scenario. Anyone can put on a brave face when they are out. You might not want me to see how much you are struggling at home. I certainly never wanted my mom to know I was pulling my hair out. She might have thought that I shouldn't have kids, and I desperately wanted her approval. If you're feeling the same way, just know that I can see right through the act. If you're struggling as a mom, it's okay. We all struggle. That's why the first chapter in this book is full of ways to be a better mom that take less than ten seconds to implement. Even when you are barely staying afloat, you can find time for these tips.

Once you get through the first chapter, you won't feel so overwhelmed. That's why chapter two has great ideas that might take about ten minutes. Save these for when you are feeling more confident. You will get there. I promise. After that, you're ready to tackle things like how you use your time, how you feel about yourself as a mom, and figuring out your children's personalities. By the end of the book, you can think about how to create great memories with your kids and the importance of thinking beyond the next week.

But take it slow. Motherhood is a marathon, not a sprint. I didn't raise seven kids in a month. It takes time. It takes lots of little minutes and little choices that add up to months and years and lifetimes. The whole point is to enjoy the ride. That's why I'm writing this book for you. I want you to enjoy being a mom. I want you to embrace the broken eggs and the scraped knees, and the slobbery kisses and drawings. Life is good. Being a mom is good. Let's learn how to enjoy it!

Since I'm at the end of this delightful intro, I'm off to the bathroom. :)

Chapter 1

Ten Second Fixes

When your children are young, it's hard to see the big picture because you feel like you are suffocating. Each moment feels like a matter of survival, and the thought of being a good parent is the farthest from your mind. You're just trying to keep yourself and your children alive. I understand. That's how I felt a lot when you and your siblings were young. I would manage to get you all loaded in the car to go somewhere only to realize that none of you had shoes. This is the face of motherhood that many moms get stuck in. I want you to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I want you to actually feel good about yourself and your children. I want you to enjoy this crazy ride. So this chapter is full of tips to help you rise above the chaos, and they only take about 10 seconds each to implement.

Look your children in the eye

Looking your children in the eye seems like such a simple little thing to do. It isn't. I found myself looking at the TV, my tablet, the computer screen. Your little brother would actually play peekaboo around my tablet because it was always between me and him. He would push it away, slide his finger across it to close out the apps, and kick at it with his feet. I finally got the message and started putting my tablet on the arm of the chair. When he looked at me, I looked right back. It became quite fun to make little faces with him and get him to laugh. Before long, I wasn't just looking in his eyes. I was stroking his hair or playing with his fingers. And he was loving every minute of it.

When your children come up to you, put down everything and look them in the eye. This takes like two seconds. Can you spare two seconds? This one act will connect you with your children in very deep and meaningful ways. Your dad always reminded me that the eyes are the window to the soul. He hated looking at people's eyes when he was a kid. Then he heard that eyes are the window to the soul, and he determined that he had to see for himself. He started looking people in the eye whenever he could and was amazed at what he saw. He could tell if they were happy or sad. He could see if this was a person he wanted to trust or not. You'll be able to tell quite a bit about what is going on with your children if you take the time to look them in the eyes.

By taking the time to look at your children's eyes, you are also able to do something else. You are forced to give your children your undivided attention. You can't pay attention to your children if you are listening to them, but at the same time scanning your facebook feed. Your brain just doesn't work that way. You should know. How many times did you try to talk to me and realize five minutes later that I hadn't heard a word you said. I didn't even know you were talking to me. Don't do that to your kids. When you hear someone say, "Mom," drop everything and look at the person.

Now, in my defense, you didn't always make it easy to look you in the eye when you were talking. You would literally start talking to me and then turn and walk down the hall to your room, while you were still talking! It would come out something like, "Mom, I have been researching rabbit cages on Amazon and I need you to look at them. The ducks need four square feet each, and suoine dkhto, heoihkld kldnjksjf kdjflkj." Whaaaaa? So, yeah, sometimes it's your kid's fault that you aren't looking them in the eye. You have my permission to put the blame squarely on them if they like to walk away from you while talking.

So, how would I rank the importance of this tiny little step in relating to children? Let's put it this way. If you start making this a habit, a whole bunch of other great parenting things are going to fall into place for you. It's one of those cool things that starts a domino effect, and before you know it, you feel like a really great mom. You were a great mom before, but now you'll feel like a great mom. And we all need a little more of that, now, don't we?

Here's your assignment. When you cuddle up with your baby to nurse, look them in the eye. When your toddler yells, "Mom!," turn and look them in the eye. In a few years, when your holy-cow-when-did-you-become-a-teenager starts talking, look them in the eye. Let me know how it changes your relationship with each of them. I bet it's only good stuff. Oh, and when they do all those things again tomorrow, look them in the eye again. Bonus points if you start looking your husband in the eye when he talks, too.

Smile

You always thought I was mad at you as a child. I'm not completely sure where you got this idea, but I suspect that if I had made a more concerted effort to smile, you wouldn't have thought that. Now that you're an adult, too, I can say that I think my face just looks like that. I wasn't mad at you all the time. I was actually proud of your responsibility and dedication to your interests. I thought you were crazy silly and had great timing with funny lines. I should have smiled more.

So, my second little ten second fix is to smile. I know what you are thinking. My toddler just covered the bathroom with toilet paper. The baby spit up on my shirt. We have no clean towels. I have twenty minutes to fix dinner and I just discovered I have no thawed meat, and you want me to smile! The thing about smiling is that you don't have to be happy to do it. If you smile, even when you aren't happy, your mind and body tends to follow the cue. Isn't that the coolest thing?

The thing that makes me feel a bit stupid is how often I was happy, but didn't bother to smile so that other people would know I was happy. Why did I do that? There has always been about a hundred times more going on in my head than what I allowed to show on the surface. Your dad actually said that I was like a blank book when he met me. I was the only person he ever met that he couldn't read. Perhaps that wasn't such a good thing. I felt misunderstood, but it was because I failed to communicate what was going on inside. If I could back up a bit, I would smile more.

It's funny how we like to be miserable and frown. We want to feel sorry for ourselves because our life is so difficult. We are so misunderstood. Our house is always a mess. Our kids are always crying. Our husband never helps us out. So we walk around with a scowl and a frown. Our children, like you, think that we are always mad. That's a very sad thing. If you, even as a teenager, thought that I was mad all the time, when I wasn't, what will your children think if you don't smile very often. I want to be thought of as a happy person, so I need to communicate that I am happy with a smile.

Smiling can be done very quickly, and is a very effective way to improve the entire atmosphere in your home. Smiling is like yawns. It's highly contagious. If you smile, it won't take long before your kids can't help but smile. Then you won't have to feel so sorry for yourself because your kids are always crying. (Funny how that works, huh?) Even smiling at a complete stranger in the grocery store can be an incredibly powerful thing. Try it. Just smile for no reason and see what happens.

*Just smile for no reason and
see what happens.*

If your children have incredibly strong emotional immune systems and don't catch the smiling disease from you, there is a trick to help them. I'll tell you about it later. I used it with your brothers all the time. They could be rather persistent with their crankbutt I-refuse-to-smile-even-though-my-mom-is-making-incredibly-silly-faces attitudes, but they always gave in and smiled eventually. Once you get used to smiling, your body will prefer to be happy and smile, instead of being mean mommy all the time.

Your assignment is to smile. Right now! Just smile whether you feel like it or not. Chances are, you'll feel so silly, you'll enjoy smiling. Don't let yourself walk around all grumpy as a mom. Life is good, at least most of the time. Choose to be happy. You are only given so many years to walk through this life. Don't spend them wishing things were different and growling at your kids. Just choose to smile, for your benefit and theirs.

Put down your electronics

If you have truly been practicing looking your children in the eye, this next tip is going to come naturally. Just put down your phone. Look away from the screen. Look at your children. I know it's hard. I thought that game on my tablet was so important. There was an event going on! I had to collect the items before the time ran out, or I wouldn't have the complete collection! I would like to tell myself, "Put the ! @#&^%\$ tablet down! Your child is talking to you!" Don't make the same mistake. I know those electronics seem so important. The email needs to be checked. I'm expecting a reply. I want to research purchases on Amazon. I need to pay these bills. Take it from someone who knows. All those things can wait.

Please step away from your phone!

We've watched documentaries that show the harmful effects of being plugged in all the time. We know that it affects our sleep and hormones. We know it damages relationships. But we still ignore those little people when they are trying to get our attention. I'm not blaming you. I set a pretty poor example. I am hoping that you and I can start to do better. Again, if we always look at our children when they are talking, we won't be looking at our screens. If we keep this up, we might just fall in love with our children all over again, and those screens won't have the same pull they used to. We'll look forward to hearing about the game our child invented. We'll want to see the car they built with blocks. We'll want to help them tie their shoes. If we keep up this crazy attention giving long enough, we might even find that we are smiling without realizing it. See how these little 10 second fixes can really add up to amazing I'm-a-good-parent stuff?

Can I tell you a little secret? I figured this out somewhere along the way raising the seven of you. It's the ten second choices we make that eventually become our entire life. We don't live life in five year increments. We live it one second at a time. Make those seconds count.

Ask them about their drawing

I know your children are still pretty young, but eventually they will see a crayon and discover that it's fun to rub it on paper. You weren't quite as much an artist as all your siblings. You are an amazing artist, but you never thought so. Your little brother, however, delighted in filling every piece of paper in the house with drawings of dinosaurs. I figure, at least he wasn't falling out of trees or beating up his brother, right? He had to explain every drawing to me. I'm glad he didn't seem to mind or notice that I threw most of them away. Another example of just doing what needs to be done. I'm glad I looked at his drawings and listened to him describe them. I'm sure it helped develop our relationship. Look at your kid's drawings. It's a good thing.

Your other brother, on the other hand, spent a while simply filling pages with color. It's a whole lot harder and, let's face it, downright tedious to comment yet again., "Wow! Look at that amazing blue streak!" That's just annoying. But, do it anyway! They just want your attention and approval, and if commenting on their blue blob does it, by golly, comment on their blue blob! Ok, that was a bit intense, but maybe I needed the reminder.

This concept applies to more than just drawing. Anytime they want to show you something, take a minute to acknowledge their hard work. But, it's just a playdough donut! Remember, play is a child's work. It's how they learn about the world. It's how they figure out cause and effect, and how their movement affects those around them. Yeah, I could have told them if they plow into their little sister, their little sister would scream. But, hey, I'm just letting them explore the world on their own. So, yes, look at the drawings and the playdough, and the block thing with wings, and the two mismatched socks that they put on all by themselves. They just want to know that you care.

Breathe, just breathe

You remember the movie, "Ever After?" Danielle was helped by Leonardo DaVinci and her friends to go and tell the Prince that she was not what she claimed to be. She was so incredibly nervous, fearing rejection, and not sure what she should even say. She stood there, in her beautiful dress, and simply said to herself, "Breathe, just breathe." That is probably my favorite scene in the whole movie.

*We live life one second at a time.
Make those seconds count.*

Motherhood can be the same way. Sometimes you need to remind yourself to just breathe. Sometimes it doesn't matter what any parenting book says. You just want to collapse in a heap in the middle of the kitchen floor and burst into tears. This is when all you can do is breathe. There is a point of desperation when you have to find the bottom line. For me, that bottom line was that all of you kids were still alive and breathing. That was something I could hold on to when everything else seemed wrong. Life is precious. Be sure to be thankful for this amazing life everyday.

This is a good time to mention that even when you are enjoying being a mom, things go wrong. You have bad days. The kids scream and whine and get sick and puke all over you. It's easy to just scream back. I never actually puked back, but I guess that's an option if you're sick enough. I did scream back, though, more than I care to admit. If I would have just done that ridiculous thing and counted to ten and breathed, I could have helped all of you calm down faster. We would have reached some semblance of order instead of me just feeding the rage. I know this is probably one of the hardest things I will mention in the book. Let's get it out of the way right at the beginning and be honest with ourselves. You will probably forget to breathe, because letting all the rage and frustration pour out of your mouth is so much more satisfying, or so it seems. But every time you can breathe instead of explode, you will notice that peace comes quicker. You will feel better as a mom. Your children will have just a bit more trust in you. Your home will be that much more enjoyable to be in.

The next time you feel like a geyser, try to breathe instead. It's a small thing and only takes a moment's thought, but it could be the biggest thing you can do for you and your family. By the way, this silly little tip works in every relationship you will ever have. Husbands don't respond to the geyser response any better than kids do.

Listen to them speak

Thus far, you have hopefully been practicing looking at your children in the eye, smiling more, putting down your electronics, asking your children about their projects and when all else fails, just breathing. I bet you are already enjoying being a mom at least a tiny bit more than when you started. My next tip is not a huge leap from what you are already doing. When you look your children in the eye, I want you to truly listen to what they are saying.

Didn't you always hate it when you would talk for like a whole paragraph and then look at me and say, "You weren't listening to me, were you?" No, I admit I wasn't. What I was doing was probably important to me, like paying the bills or working on my website. But I hadn't trained myself to listen for your voice and pay attention. I allowed children's voices to become a murmur in the background. I learned to tune you out and I am so sorry for that. I want you to do better with your kids.

I know it seems like what they are saying isn't important. But the thing is, it's important to them so it should be important to us. Your ducks and everything connected to them was important to you. Your brother's ideas for a video game were important to him. Your sister asking to bake something was important. Your children will have things to say, yes, small, but important. When they are big, the things they say, like who they should marry, will seem very important all of a sudden. But in their eyes, there was no difference. If they took the time to come and talk to you, it was important.

*I know it seems like what they are saying
isn't important. But the thing is, it's
important to them so it should be important
to us.*

So how do you train yourself to truly listen to your children? If you are already working on the habit of making eye contact, you have done half the work. The other half is to learn what true listening is. Most people listen in order to come up with a good reply. This is a selfish form of listening. True and helpful listening is fueled by a desire to understand where they are coming from. Why is this important to them? What are they struggling with? What do they need from me? How are they feeling about this? Are they hurt or feeling misunderstood? You can't figure any of this out if you are listening just enough to figure out a cool response.

The challenge then, is to combine everything we have learned so far. When your child comes to you, you might need to breathe rather than feel impatient at the interruption. You should put down the phone or whatever it is that is in the way. It's a good idea to smile at your child so they know you love them. Look in their eyes so they feel valued and important. Ask them what they need or want, and then listen with the intent of understanding. Wow, that's a lot! It is, but it honors your children in an incredible way. We'll be talking about this much more later, but I want you to see the importance of showing your children that you value them as people. They aren't just the "little ones", or annoyances. They are your family. They will be adults some day. You can honor them now by simply listening to them when they are two.

What if they don't know how to talk? How am I supposed to listen to them when they are constantly tugging on my arm and screaming at me? That's what sign language is for, sweet pea! I taught more sign language to your little brothers. They were really good at the words please and cheese. And that's all a one year old really needs to communicate anyway, right? Sign language. Teach them some and they will feel much less frustrated, and you can listen and help them with what they need.

Play little games with them

I know you are feeling overwhelmed, and when you feel overwhelmed, so do your children. We often expect our children to be fully in control of their emotions when they are two. Yet, we as adults often let our hair down and let our emotions get out of control. I often said to your dad, “Somebody's got to be an adult around here.” That is so absolutely true. Your two-year-old is not capable of emotional control. But you ought to be. It's not always fun being the adult, but just deal with it.

What do you do when everyone in the house seems emotionally over the top? The baby is crying. The toddler is throwing blocks at you. You haven't slept through the night in three years. This is the time when you have to be an adult. But it isn't that scary. I came up with a game for just such an occasion. It's called, “Where's your smile?” I first came up with it when your oldest brother would get sad and pouty. I'd ask him where his smile was. He, being the clown that he is, told me he couldn't find it. So we started looking for it. We checked his pockets. We looked under the table. We checked behind his ears. That smile was very elusive. I reassured him that I kept extra smiles in my pocket and asked if he'd like to borrow one. I dramatically pulled one of my “smiles” out of my pocket, but it was too big. So we tried another one. This time he had finally started giving in to the silliness of the situation and the corners of his mouth were starting to go up. By the time he tried the third smile on, he was grinning from ear to ear. The game stuck. Every time one of you was grouchy or crying or pouty, we looked for your smile. Sometimes, a sibling would come along and offer one of theirs.

I know it seems like a simple, silly thing, but let me tell you: it works 100% of the time. I always got you guys smiling by the time we were done. It lightens the mood and helps people forget their crankiness. Try it the next time everyone is out of sorts. It is such an amazing distraction and helps everyone laugh again.

You may also stumble upon a silly way to get your kids to smile. If you notice that playing peekaboo with your hats gets them grinning, then do it! Make it a family thing! Pretty soon, when you start with your silly game, they'll know what's coming and start smiling even faster. Smiling is always a good thing. Remember what we talked about before. If your body is smiling, the rest of you will follow and the smile won't feel like work anymore.

End of the chapter stuff

I hope you feel a bit better than when you started reading this book. I know how it feels to get completely overwhelmed with motherhood and just want to run away. I don't want you to stay there. Now, when everything is going wrong, you have several things you can do in just seconds to help lift the mood of the home and your spirits. Sometimes it won't be easy to do these things. Yes, they take only a few seconds, but sometimes you just don't want to do them. You want to remain stuck in your present situation, feeling tired and wanting to quit. It feels good to be miserable. What I want you to see is that feeling good about being a mom is way better. Once you've tasted bliss with your children, I hope you won't ever want to remain in despair again.

So, let's review. Everyone is tired. At least one of you is upset or cranky or crying. What do you do? First things first, remember that you are the adult. Your children are not going to say, "Mom, we need to improve the emotional atmosphere here. Let's all choose to put on our happy faces." Bummer, isn't it? Okay, so you have chosen to be the adult and lighten the mood in your home. Put a smile on your face! Breathe a nice, deep, cleansing breath. Put down your electronics. Look your children in the eye. Really listen to what they are saying or screaming. Engage them in conversation if they are old enough to talk. If they aren't, talk to them anyway. If they still haven't brightened up a bit, try looking for their smile.

These are all great ways to shake that overwhelmed feeling really fast. You have to choose to do them or they won't work. It's also very possible that you start smiling and everyone else just screams louder. And then you sink down into the emotional mud again. In this case, I recommend going to the bathroom to regroup, and then going in for another round. Smile!

Now that you've got your ten second fixes in place and are regularly using them, let's take a look at some ten minute fixes. They take a bit more effort and a bit more time, but they will help you to enjoy your children and enjoy your life. Your life is made up of minutes. Let's make the most of each one of them. See you in the next chapter!

Chapter 2

Ten minute fixes

I have to admit, this chapter is full of really cool things that I was always saying to myself, “I should do this more. I enjoyed it the last time we did it. Why can't I bring myself to do it again?” Who can explain how the mommy mind works? Anyway, I want to encourage you to actually do these things and not beat yourself up over not doing them enough. Here goes.

Go outside when everyone is stressed

I know, you're thinking, “It's 20 degrees outside and there's 12 inches of snow!” Yeah, we thought that a lot when you were kids, didn't we? Yes, when it's 20 degrees, you don't have to go outside. But, when it's not 20 degrees, this is an awesome thing to do. There is something almost magical about dropping everything and taking the kids outside. Everyone can breathe again and the pollution clears. Give it ten minutes and you have brand new children.

I recall reading a suggestion somewhere to simply announce that you are going for a walk and do it. See if anyone joins you. I tried this once with you kids. I was pregnant at the time and it was after dinner. I just started walking down the driveway. You all were hot on my tail. We had such a lovely walk, picking flowers, enjoying the summer sounds, watching the sun sink below the trees. It was such a sweet time. Be sure to try this little trick when your kids are older. When they are little, just pop them in a carrier or pull out the stroller and head out. It will do wonders for all of you.

Sometimes, it's just nice that you go out with the kids, instead of sending them out to play. Even if you just sit on the porch and watch them play, the act of going outside has healing properties. I think we are designed to be closer to nature. When we spend too much time inside, we insulate ourselves from the world, and also from our Creator. We need to feel the wind in our hair, and feel the sun on our cheeks. We need to hear the birds singing and the crickets making music and the frogs doing their thing. It's good for us physically and it's good for our soul. Yes, there are scientific studies and all that which agree with what I'm saying, but who cares about all that? Just go outside! You'll see what I mean. There's also the whole indoor air pollution thing and getting fresh air.

I think that perhaps when we go outside and see the world working just like it's supposed to, we can believe that order and purpose is possible in our lives, too. If the birds can show up everyday, and the trees can keep growing, and the dandelions can keep spreading their sunshine; I can show up everyday and keep growing and spreading some sunshine, too. I have always loved the phrase, "Bloom where you're planted." It's so much easier to do that if we are watching blooms each day when we go outside. You have design and purpose built right into you, just like the trees and flowers. Remind yourself of that when you go outside with your kids. You have an important job to do and God wants you to remember that.

So going outside helps everyone to calm down. It gives everyone a break. It heals us physically and emotionally. It surrounds us with nature and its' simple lessons. It gives us a model of order and purpose to follow. It reminds us to live out our purpose, too. Who'd a thunk that going outside could do so much? No wonder your dad was constantly telling me to go outside! I was not very good at this. I liked to stay inside, even as a kid. But everytime I chose to go outside, I never regretted it. Because it's true! Going outside is an amazing thing, and it will totally help you enjoy motherhood more. Your kids will love it, too. Go outside already! Why are you still sitting there?

Watch them play

I see that you finally took my advice and went outside. Good job! Now, just sit down and watch your kids. Really watch them. Don't try to interfere or police them. Just watch them. Aren't they beautiful? Aren't they funny? Aren't they creative? Wait... stop daydreaming. He just kicked his little sister. Now she's screaming. A plastic shovel just whizzed past your head. Yeah, sometimes that happens. And you have to do your best to calm them down. There's no magic way to do this, but you are totally equipped to handle your children. You just don't feel like it most of the time. Just go in there and try to stay calm. If you get all crazy, how are you going to calm them down? It's not easy. So, calmly divide them up and make them say sorry and all that.

Well, that was a little extra! But, hey! Life doesn't always go the way you planned. You head outside with your kids and all hell breaks loose. That's part of the art of learning to roll with the punches. Everyone's kids beat each other up sometimes. It doesn't reflect on your ability to mother. But sometimes, you will actually catch your kids being good. They will create a sandcastle together. They'll dig a bunker as a team. Yep, you guys totally did that when you were kids. I have pictures to prove it. This is what I want you to see. I want you to see how cool your kids are. They are truly amazing, and have a tremendous capacity to show love for each other. You may just have to get outside the circle to see it.

Going outside helps everyone to calm down, gives them a break, and heals them physically and emotionally.

Take the time to try to catch your kids at their best. It doesn't even have to be outside, come to think of it. When they are playing in their room, take a sneaky peak. Is that them playing together? Lock that away in your mom memory and remind yourself that you are doing a good job. Your children are not inherently evil, hell bent on destroying the world by the age of ten. They are explorers, discoverers, conquerers, comedians, artists, sweethearts, and little people just waiting to emerge from their shell. But you have to be watching to see it. Oops! I guess this is one instance where you should get out of the bathroom for a minute so you can catch your kids being cute. When you do, even once, you will have that much easier a time truly enjoying your children.

Color a picture together

Do you find yourself smiling more yet? Have you got a glimpse of how precious they are? If you have, you are ready for our next ten minute fix. If you aren't careful, it might end up an hour. I want you to sit down and color with your children. I realize you can't do this with a baby. Well, actually you could. You could color and talk to the baby while you do. They will love it, and you will feel less stressed. Your little brother loved to "color" before he was two, so you can start this relatively early. Just give them a crayon and a piece of paper and turn them loose. If you are sitting right with them and coloring on the paper, you can gently teach them to stay on the paper, too. In my experience, we have most of our chaos problems when we let our kids play unsupervised too early and too long. Then we are shocked when there are toys in the toilet and drawings on the wall. Keep your children with you so they can observe proper behavior. You can also nip that pesky craziness in the bud.

Get out the crayons!

You used to draw little ducks for your brother to color. He loved it! This is something you can do with your kids, too. I know there are always other jobs that need to be done, but you need to take the time to just be. You cannot do and do and do and then act surprised when you end up stressed, exhausted, and overwhelmed. That's why it's so important to just forget all the jobs you have and sit down with your children for a simple activity like coloring. We, as a society, have entertainment or noise or work coming at us all the time. We have to hold up a big stop sign and say, "No! I'm coloring with my kids right now!" You were raised to take a whole day off each week on Shabbat, and we'll talk about the value of that a bit later. Don't feel guilty for taking some time off from the rat race and enjoying your children. Remember, enjoying your children as they grow is the goal here. Getting the laundry done in record time is not.

For right now, pick up a box of crayons and clear a spot at the kitchen table. If your kids are new to the coloring scene, just let them do whatever. Praise them for their choice of colors, even though it's nothing but scribbles. That's how they start learning what blue is. As they get older, encourage them to stay inside the lines on coloring books. Praise them when their drawings look more and more realistic. You want to find a balance between accepting them and their work as wonderful, and encouraging them to strive towards greater heights in all that they do. If you always tell them what they can do better, they will stop trying. If you compliment them on a great job, and then simply name one thing that would make it better, it's better received by them. Why am I telling you all this? You weren't aware of it, but when you were growing up, the world was going crazy. They no longer celebrated achievement. Instead, they started praising children for just showing up. That produces spoiled, lazy adults that think you should give them a paycheck simply because they are alive. I want better for my children, and I know you want better for yours. Praise them first, and then suggest only one improvement to make their work better.

This is actually one of my favorite ways to spend time with my children, which is why we usually did this every Shabbat (Saturday) morning. You might want to pick a time to color with your children. Yes, it's that beneficial for all of you. Maybe you want to spend a few minutes coloring after lunch or dinner. Saturday morning might be a good time for you, too. Just make sure you plan for it. It's a great way to de-stress yourself, teach your children important lessons, and learn to truly enjoy spending time with them.

Read to your kids

Everyone tells you to read to your kids. They'll learn to read faster. They'll have a love of learning and books and all that good stuff. It helps them settle down before bed. They get exposed to wonderful far off lands and memorable characters. Why didn't I do it more with all of you? I was tired. By the end of the day, I just wanted to put my feet up and put in a movie. You would all sit quiet and I'd try to shoo you off to bed when the movie ended. I just didn't have it in me to read aloud to you. That's how it was for me. I regret it a bit, but I also know it was me subconsciously accepting reality. My hips and legs would be bothering me, and I just collapsed after dinner.

I don't want you to feel guilty for not reading enough to your kids. I remember making lists of what I thought a good mom was. Reading books together was always on the list. But guilt does not motivate anyone. It paralyzes us. It makes us incapable of making better decisions in the future. We become defined by our weaknesses rather than our ability to change. For me, reading to my kids became the thing I didn't do, and felt horrible because I didn't. Pretty lame and stupid sounding, huh?

*Not sure what to read to your kids?
Try reading Scripture to them.*

Well, enough of that. If reading has become a trouble spot for you, figure out a way to fix it. For me, that meant reading during a different time of day, and not trying to read every single day. I discovered that I love sitting out on our picnic bench reading books together. I read Scripture to all of you every Shabbat as a family. I always had a book that I was reading. I also encouraged all of you to read good books. Then we could talk about the interesting books we were reading. Even if I didn't have this amazing daily read aloud program in our family, you all still enjoy reading. You love an interesting plot. We enjoy reading together when the mood strikes. Reading is a good thing. I want you to read to your kids. But don't become a slave to an ideal that doesn't exist, or at least doesn't exist for you.

Every idea I give you in this book is a great idea, otherwise I wouldn't have included it. But I want you to make it your own. You are an awesome mom! We both know that you are not the same type of person as me. We see the world differently. Different things are important to us. But we both love our kids and we can both show our kids love in our own unique way. Before I go too far down that little country lane, I'll just let you know that we'll be discussing mom personalities and such in chapter 5.

Go read to your kids, at a time and place that works for you. And while you're at it, pick good books. There's no point in going to the effort and voice strain to read to your kids, and then read them garbage. Need some ideas? Start with the Bible. After that, you can't go wrong with classics. Even when children are little, you can read stories to them that are a bit above their level. You don't have to limit yourself to "Frog and Toad." You know what? Remind me, and I'll list some of my favorite books in the back of this book.

*Don't become a slave to an ideal that
doesn't exist.*

Why does reading aloud help you enjoy your children more? It's a combination of factors really. You get to snuggle your kids. You get to share with them some of the books that you read as a child, and that's always special. You get to hear their perspective on the story. When they are little, it's so cute to hear them try to pronounce the names of characters. They have a simple view of the world where bad guys are bad guys and good guys are good guys. And they aren't afraid to say who's who. The inevitable little discussions give you a glimpse into your child's heart. The better you know your child, the more you can enjoy them. When you understand some of the things floating around in their brains, they become little people, not just mouths to feed and bodies to bathe. They are someone with opinions and meaningful thoughts, much more a companion than you thought a three year old could be. And all this can be yours simply by taking the time to read to your children. Sounds like a pretty good deal to me, which is why I learned to make this more of a priority myself.

Be silly

Your brother never ceases to crack me up. One time he came in from feeding the animals at the barn. I asked him, "How goes the war?" which is what my mother always asked me. Your brother is such a goofball and so quick on his feet. He answered, "The robots have taken over Eastern Oklahoma." Hilarious! I'm laughing while I tell you about it. You know what else is funny? Tickling your sister around the waist and then trying to get her in a headlock. The funny part is that she could totally take me any day of the week, but she played along beautifully. You all have different ways of making me laugh, and I think I have my funny moments, too. We like to be silly! They say laughter is the best medicine, and you know what? It's true. Even the Bible tells us that a merry heart does good like a medicine.

This ten minute fix is to simply be silly with your children. Get them to laugh. Laugh when they are funny. You don't have to be an authority figure all the time. Have some fun, for goodness sake. You won't feel as stressed and overwhelmed if you get silly sometimes. No, get silly a lot! It really is that good for you. When your dad and I would be upset with each other, we could usually snap out of it with a bit of humour. Once we were in a better mood, we could discuss why we got upset in the first place. It works when kids are upset, too. Not all the time, but I'd definitely try a little silliness when your children seem strung out or upset. It doesn't always work, and you need to know your children well enough to know when to just leave them alone. But definitely pack some silliness in your bag of tricks as a mom. It might come in handy some day.

I see a lot of moms that are just unhappy. They look like they have forgotten how to laugh. It makes them look miserable and old. I imagine they get angry easily, and are feeling overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising kids. Just like a smile helps your whole body feel better, a laugh does an even better job. It's like a smile on overdrive. If an angry, unhappy mom looks old, yep, you got it. A laughing, smiling, happy mom looks young. Being silly is good for your face, your body, your soul, and also your family.

You want to know one more benefit of laughing and silliness? Everyone around you feels better. You see, moms set the atmosphere in the home. You know that when I was having a bad day, everyone was having a bad day. But if I was in a good mood and joking and laughing, everyone else could have fun, too. Keep that in mind. Sometimes we bring the frustration on ourselves because we allow ourselves to stay in that grumpy mood. Then we can't figure out why our kids are driving us crazy and giving us attitudes. Check your attitude first before blaming the kids. Remember to put the smile on, even if you don't feel like smiling. Then act a bit silly with your kids. Before you know it, you'll be smiling and that grumpy weight will be lifted from your whole family. It's a good thing.

End of chapter stuff

Before I send you off to play outside and get silly with your kids, I want to give you a word of warning. This pitfall has trapped me more times than I want to admit. You'd think I would learn. Nope. Please heed my warning and do better than I did. If you screw this up anyway, just know that I made the same mistake. I bet you're wondering what this horrible thing is, aren't you?

Be careful about talking on the phone. I know that talking on the phone is inevitable, but be cautious about two hour conversations. You see, while you are happily chatting away, your children will be plotting world war 3. And you were unwittingly elected as master in chief of the invasion. That's why they will harrass you and chase you and pull on your clothes. You will run, but you cannot hide. The laundry room might be safe for ten or twenty minutes. But they will find you! So you head to the bathroom, which is normally a decent place to hide. But you forgot that the bathroom is really only good for about five minutes. That's when you get desperate and retreat to the closet.

If you are crouching in the closet behind your clothes, you need to ask yourself some questions. What are your children doing right now? Are they alive? Is this conversation worth the mess you will find upon emerging from your wardrobe cocoon? I know it sucks, but the truth is that talking on the phone is a recipe for disaster. Use your time on the phone wisely. Time it while they are watching a movie, or in bed asleep. Keep it shorter so that you can get back to monitoring your children. There's also the magic of instant messaging. It doesn't require your full attention and if you need to go tend to something, you can wait to return a message. I love that!

This whole mothering thing can be pretty demanding. I know that it gets hard sometimes, ok, a lot of times. That's why I want you to look at your children and be happy you are their mom. I want you to enjoy being with them. I want you to invest in them. I see so many moms that can't wait to get away from their children because they are just pulling their hair out. They have one child and the thought of another brings criminal activities to mind. There is a better way. You kids drove me crazy, but I absolutely loved being with you. I enjoyed all of your quirky ways. I wanted to play your games and hear your stories. Yeah, I hid in the bathroom and talked on the phone. But when I came back from my little escapes, I was ready to ride the wave with all of you again.

This is my goal for you, and your sisters, and moms who just can't seem to get their head above water. Start with the simple things like smiling, then start laughing with your children. You know you love them, now start living each day like you love them. Let them see your love, by showing them that you actually want to be with them. In the next chapter, we're going to take this a step further. Thus far, I have wanted you to learn to enjoy your children. Now, we're going to take a few pages to talk about what it means to love them.

Chapter 3

Love Your children

It is hard for me to believe that I have to write a chapter called “Love your children” but I have seen some very disturbing trends among parents, and even in myself. These trends are a large part of the reason I wanted to write this book for you. I don't want you to slide into the selfish, one-sided bad habits that many parents have fallen into. I want you to truly love your children as our Heavenly Father loves us. But before we can do that, we have to understand what loving our children really looks like.

In Scripture, we are taught to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Golden Rule, treat others the way you want to be treated, is a great definition of true love. It is also super helpful when we look at how to love our children. It's also where I see parents stumbling in their relationship with their children. Too many times, we are looking out for ourselves as parents, and our children are expected to fit into our needs. Let's get started.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Luke 10:27

Practice compassion

You can show compassion to your children, even if you don't understand why a situation might make them so upset. If you see someone crying, showing compassion would be asking them what is wrong, offering a hug, helping to solve the problem, etc. We, as moms, have a natural desire to care for our children. We want to hold them and wipe away their tears. We want to fix their boo-boos and make everything okay. But there have been way too many advice givers, parenting “experts” and religious leaders making us feel guilty for showing compassion to our children.

When our children are infants, we are told to sleep train them. If we hold them too much, we are spoiling them. They need to be taught obedience by six months, and learn to eat what they are given. This is not compassion, and it forces mothers to act contrary to their instincts. We cannot let other people tell us how to raise our children when their advice is nothing more than a muzzle on our desire to comfort our children. Pick them up when they cry. Cuddle them constantly if necessary. That's what baby carriers are for. You know I used them until I couldn't carry your siblings around anymore. Rock them to sleep. Nurse them as long as possible. When they are young, nurture them in every way. Show them that you love them and will always be there for them. Build a relationship of trust and security. I know this goes against what the majority of people are saying, but I think if you listen very carefully to your heart, you will know that just loving on your baby is the absolute right thing to do.

When our children are toddlers, they seem to experience more shame than anything.

“You're being a bad boy!”

“Stop doing that!”

“You have to eat your dinner all up.”

“Stay in your bed until I say you can come out.”

Where's the compassion here? We are being told once again that they must comply to our view of reality or else. Yes, children need to be taught safety. They need to listen when we give them instructions for their own good. When we put them in the carseat, they need to willingly comply and stay in it. You know that! But are we turning everything into a battle of the wills? Compassion would emphasize how much we love them and want to keep them safe. Compassion would make an uncomfortable but necessary situation into a game to make it easier for a toddler. I taught all of you to hold hands in the parking lot, but it wasn't a barked out order. It was a game. "Everybody chain up!" Safety procedures and necessary obedience can be taught within a context of love, not a power struggle.

I always expected each of you to eat what you were given. I never ran a restaurant, and with seven kids, I wasn't going to start. But I did my best to accommodate likes and dislikes. Your little brother didn't like onions, so he didn't get onions. We used onion powder for awhile. But I wasted no time teaching him to like cooked onions. I was very open with him about what I put in the meal, and taught him the health benefits of each ingredient. He still doesn't like the raw, but he learned to get excited about cooked. What does this have to do with compassion? When it comes to food, show some respect for your children. We, as adults, don't eat food we don't like. But we also can learn to eat in ways that are healthier for us. Our children can do the same. Treat them as though they have some intelligence and they will act as though they have some intelligence.

Safety procedures and necessary obedience can be taught within a context of love.

Another way to show compassion to your children is to recognize that their crying, complaining, whining, etc. might be their only way to communicate a real need. We may not be listening well enough to them when they ask nicely. So they raise their voice and do whatever is necessary to get your attention. When they pull on your clothes, ask them what they need. After all, when you're hungry, wouldn't you want some food? If you were sitting in a wet diaper, wouldn't you want to be changed? Okay, that's just a terribly funny thought! The point is, recognize that they have legitimate needs and try to meet those needs. Don't just yell at them or discipline them for "bad attitudes." Investigate the cause of the bad behavior first.

This is a tremendous way to show love to our children, and it's built into the mom psyche, but too many of us have been convinced that we will spoil our children if we meet their needs too quickly. I believe the opposite is true. When our children know they will be heard and cared for, why would they have any need to stomp their feet and yell and scream? If you could ask nicely and know that you will get what you need, would you skip that step and start rioting in the street? Probably not, yet we expect our children to behave that way. Our children are little versions of us. If we ask ourselves, "Would I want to be treated that way?" we'll probably figure out the response we need to give to our children. Those are words to live by right there! We'll talk about that Golden Rule idea in chapter 8.

Right now, I want you to get this vision of loving your children in a real and concrete way. I want you to see a world where children can trust their parents to meet their needs, and feel safe and protected. We can't get everyone to treat their children in this loving, honoring way, but we can treat our children this way. We can choose to feed our children when they are hungry. We can hold and rock them when they are scared. We can cuddle and read to them when they just need some mommy time. And we don't have to feel guilty about it. We are simply treating our children as human beings deserving of some honor and respect.

Love when it hurts

I am a horrible night-time mommy. I always have been. I want to clock out at 9:30 pm and not show up for work again until at least 8 am. But that is the farthest thing from reality, at least when children are little. Babies wake up in the middle of the night. Toddlers don't want to go to bed when you tell them to. Even older children want to come in and sit on the bed first thing in the morning and talk to you, even though you could totally sleep for another hour. That's life, but sometimes it just plain stinks. Sometimes you are so tired and cranky that you don't feel you can give another inch of love to anyone. That's when the rubber meets the road.

Your little brother number seven nursed longer than any of you. He woke up in the night a lot. We developed a little routine to make it easier for me. We'd get up and change his diaper, then cuddle in the recliner and watch cooking shows while he nursed. He would fall asleep and I would carefully carry him to his bed and then slip back into mine. Occasionally, he would even let me sleep through the night!

I want you to get this vision of loving your children in a real and concrete way. I want you to see a world where children can trust their parents to meet their needs, and feel safe and protected.

But one night (which is, unfortunately, representative of a few more nights) did not go so well. We were all recovering from a cold and when he woke me up some time after midnight, I did not want to get up. I dragged myself up and put my fleece bathrobe on, which was way too warm. We got the diaper changed, and then I thought I would take him back to bed with me. This turned out to be a rather horrible plan. He nursed and fell asleep at first. But then I decided I wanted my arm back and he woke up. He proceeded to scream six inches from my ear. I officially went over the deep end. I tried to shoosh him calmly, but pretty soon it turned into an angry, “Just go to sleep!” The angrier I got, the louder he screamed. In a huff, I stormed out of bed and grabbed my bathrobe. In the process, I whipped, no, slapped the bathrobe tie right across my face. It got both of my open eyes. He waited for me in bed, while I went in the bathroom with burning eyes and tears streaming down my face! Funny how removing my angry vibes from the room left him starting to doze off in bed.

While I tried to recover from this literal slap in the face, my heart was breaking. I had chosen selfishness when my son just needed some extra love from his momma. I was trying to shortchange him to get more sleep, and if I had just gotten up and fed him like we normally do, I would have already been asleep by now. Instead, that night and its emotional nastiness cost me over three hours sleep.

Once I could see again, I went and scooped him up and nestled him on my shoulder. I chose to love him this time with “I’m sorry” and “Mommy loves you.” It took awhile to get us both settled down to sleep, and I still can’t help but wonder if we would have gained a few hours sleep if I had handled it differently. You see, sometimes love hurts. Love is choosing to do what is best for the other person. We don’t always feel like that. We are imperfect human beings and sometimes we behave very selfishly. I want you to realize two things, maybe three. We’ll see.

One, realize and accept that you're going to have bad days. I've been a mom for awhile and I still have bad days. You are not required to be a perfect mom and your children will be fine even when you lose your temper or act selfishly sometimes. Please don't allow yourself to be crippled by guilt because you think you are somehow failing. Successful parenting is in the showing up every day.

Two, do your best to love even when it hurts. You see, love is an action. It's not a warm, fuzzy feeling. You will probably not feel warm and fuzzy at 3 am. But you can choose to show love and meet the needs of your child. Sit and watch cooking shows if that makes it easier. Get a piece of cheese to nibble on while they nurse. Remember that taking care of their needs usually takes way less time than getting mad at being woke up and then having to calm yourself and your child down. That, and it really hurts to get a bathrobe strap in the eye.

Each day, decide to love

Love is a choice. It's an active decision to put the other person and their needs first. I want you to keep that in mind as we talk about loving your kids. It's a choice that you have to make, and you have to make it every day. When you get up in the morning, decide to love your children. When they are pulling your eyelids up and staring at you, it's hard to want to put their needs first. But it's the grown up thing to do, and it's the right thing to do. I don't want to park here very long, because talking about the shoulds of life can get tedious. Sometimes love is hard. Sometimes you just have to decide to love. That's what I want you to remember. That's why I'm writing this book to you.

*Love is an active decision to put the
other person first.*

As you learn to enjoy your children more, it gets that much easier to choose to do what is best for them. You are enjoying each day with them. Then, when it gets ugly, at least you have a nice taste in your mouth to fall back on. That's my theory anyways! Hey! Isn't it better to feel like you are having fun with your kids at least most of the time? When they start puking on you, at least you can remind yourself of the cute little thing they did the day before. You'll know which read aloud book is their favorite because you took some time to read to them every now and then. Choosing to clean up the puke and snuggle them while they are sick just got that much easier.

On the other hand, if you are still only in survival mode and your children are still driving you crazy, the puke on your shirt could end up being the straw that broke the camel's back and left you in an emotional puddle on the floor. We don't want that.

The whole idea here is to decide, each day, to do what you can to show honor and respect to your children. Show them you love and care about them. Learn to enjoy them in the little things. The choices we make each day will add up to weeks and months and years. Make good choices each day that benefit your children. When you have bad days, they'll just be bumps on the road as you stroll through life, rather than huge potholes of insanity you can't seem to get out of. Live in this moment, enjoying its pleasures and tackling its stresses. Don't feel guilty about yesterday, and try not to worry too much about tomorrow. You got this!

*Decide, each day, to do what you
can to show honor and respect to
your children.*

Write it down

I know it seems silly, but I want you to get a piece of paper and something to write with. Go ahead, I'll wait. Okay, I want you to write the name of your child at the top of the page, one page for each child. Now start writing everything you love about that child. Do they have cute freckles or an adorable smile? Write it down. Do you love how they laugh, or the way they use their fist to eat bread? Write it down. Think of everything you possibly can, and then keep this paper or papers somewhere that you can refer to often. When you are having a bad day, or a bad week, pull out these papers. You're probably hiding in the bathroom, so you might as well keep those papers in there. That was a good idea, right there! Remind yourself of all the things you love about your children. Take a deep breath, and go show them you love them.

Maybe someday, you can show these papers to your children. They might think it's cool that you loved the incessant stream of dinosaur drawings they provided. Yes, I know that was your brother, not you. But it was a good example, nonetheless. And you can tell them to write down everything they love about their children, too. We'll start a whole movement of love letters to our children. Come on! Stop rolling your eyes. There's worse things to be known for.

End of chapter stuff

I know this was a more serious chapter, but it had to go somewhere. This idea of loving our children is just too important to leave out. Here's what I want you to remember. Your children are little people with needs and emotions. Take care of their needs. Be gentle with their emotions. Allow them to express themselves in healthy ways. Give them some breathing room to be human and imperfect. In other words, treat them the way you would want to be treated. Also keep in mind that it is usually much more efficient to take care of their needs than get upset about the disturbance and then have to clean up the emotional mess you just made.

Sometimes it's hard to be a mom. On those days, you just have to choose to be an adult and do what is best for your children anyway. To make it easier, take some time to write down everything you love about your children. Remind yourself of those things when you just want to scream. Showing love fixes a lot of things. Remember that giving your children everything they demand is not love. Giving them what they need and showing them that they are a valued member of your family is love. A sense of belonging and value is far more important to a child, or an adult, than any toy.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about you as a mom. You are going to approach things different than me, because you aren't me. I'm trying to give you some universal helps to enable you to start truly enjoying your children. When you learn more about yourself and how to embrace your uniqueness, things really start getting awesome.

Chapter 4

Know thyself

We've been talking a lot about your children. I want you to enjoy them and feel better about yourself as a mom. So, let's talk about you, now. You are totally unique, and that is awesome. That means you are going to approach motherhood and your children in a very unique way. In a way you are much like every mom, and we'll talk about that first. But there are ways that you are totally different. We'll talk about that, too. You aren't and can't be a perfect mom, but you are perfectly designed for this awesome task. So, let's get started.

You are not alone

Yes, there are moms out there that don't often feel overwhelmed. They usually have extra help and one child. I have seven children now, and most days I can totally roll with the punches, but I still have days where I just want to crawl back into bed and not come out for a week. When you feel like this, just know that you are not alone. Every mom struggles with insecurity and frustration. Every mom thinks they are certain to destroy their children. Every mom has days when they are amazed that they survived until bedtime. You are not alone.

*You aren't and can't be a perfect mom,
but you are perfectly designed for this
awesome task.*

If you haven't yet, you will someday meet the mom who appears to have it all together. They would never yell at their child to get off the chicken coop roof, because their child would never climb on the chicken coop roof. Their children are always perfectly groomed. They have matching socks and pretty little bows in their hair. The mom looks like she just got a makeover on a tv show. Must I go on? You will be standing there, just thankful all your children got out of their jammies before going to the park. You will have just returned from the car where you put the last diaper on the baby and he is now walking around in nothing but a diaper and a t-shirt. Your outfit will consist mostly of denim and you think you remember washing your hair this week.

How should you respond when this inevitable day comes? You could amuse yourself by trying to imagine what her deep dark secret is. You see, every mom has problems. Every mom has areas of their life where they struggle and don't want anyone to know their weaknesses. I have never been a great housekeeper. It's really not my fault, you know. You kids were always making messes faster than those nasty ants could clear a landscape. You were literally able to make messes in your sleep! So, I was always very self conscious about my house. Everyone seemed to keep a cleaner house than me. I met women that had perfect homes, and apologized that they hadn't had a chance to clean. Ummm..... But then I found out that they had issues with their kids fighting, or their husband was gone more than he was home. We all have our issues! Some of us hide them better than others, but we all have them. We all wonder if we are doing a good enough job with our kids. We all think about all the things we should be doing and aren't.

Simply put, when you think you are the only one struggling with something, just google it. There's probably an entire facebook group or 30 groups for moms to talk about that one problem. You are not alone.

You are unique

I have always been fascinated with personality tests, even when I was a kid. I remember taking a test to find out what careers would suit me. I got librarian or mortician. Apparently I like quiet. I wish I had quiet every now and then. Yep, that's what the bathroom is for, apparently. I didn't know it then, but I have discovered that I am an introvert. I enjoy being around people. I spent several years traveling and teaching the Bible to children. But I definitely need time afterwards to unwind. I have always loved journaling for this reason. I like to write down my thoughts in the quiet by myself. It's very refreshing for me.

I would definitely take a personality test, and then take a few more. It can really help you understand your idiosyncracies and special ways of doing things. I bet you didn't realize that your personality affects the way you mother your children. It does, in so many ways. Just knowing you are either an introvert or an extrovert will help you feel better as a mom. I learned that I could do quite a few things with you guys during the day. We could run errands or go on little trips. But when the chores were done after dinner, I was done. So we watched movies in the evening. We were still all together, but I needed that down time without little people crawling all over me and wanting to talk and interact. I felt guilty for a lot of years, because good moms read to their kids before bed. That is what I thought, at least. As an introvert, I just couldn't do it. I didn't have the energy or desire at 8 pm to do anything. So I read to you in the morning or early afternoon instead.

*We all wonder if we are doing
a good enough job with our
kids.*

You may prefer things to be kept very neat, or you may not mind some mess. We'll talk about ways to manage your time and your home later. Right now, work on finding a level of tidiness that feels right for you. Without seven children around someday, I will probably keep the house much nicer. I like counters clear and everything nice and neat. But right now, I have found a happy medium. The home is safe, and we try to keep everything in it's place. I taught you guys to do chores and learned to be satisfied with your abilities at doing the jobs. Don't compare your home to other homes. Maintain your home at a level that is comfortable for you. It also needs to be a level that you can maintain without going crazy.

Be honest about your energy levels. I read the book "The Child Whisperer" by Carol Tuttle, and it was one of the most helpful parenting books I've ever read. Carol helps you to identify not only your personality, but your energy level and general approach to life. She teaches you how to identify your energy type and your children's energy types. When we recognize that each child and each mom is unique, we have the freedom to raise our children in a style that honors our personality and theirs. This revolutionized our home. It was especially helpful for your dad. He always had a hard time understanding you kids, because you did not respond to situations the same way he did. When we identified your types, he could comprehend that you were responding differently because you were different. Read this book! Figure out what type you are. Then raise your children in your own unique style.

We, as moms, need to stop inventing definitions of what we are supposed to be, and start being who we already are.

I used to have this image in my mind of what a good mom was. She wore aprons and baked with her kids everyday. She read like five stories to her kids before they drifted off to sleep in a bed with coordinated linens. Her kitchen floor was always mopped. When you were little, I literally tore myself up over the fact that I wasn't this mom. I tried, but I wasn't designed to do all those things. It has taken many years for me to figure out that I'm a good mom because I'm me. I have since decided that I have no use for aprons and would rather get a little flour on my shirt. I'm happy if you have sheets on your bed and are nice and warm under a blanket. I would still like a cleaner kitchen floor, but we're working on it. And I get so tired when I read aloud. But I do read Scripture to you every Shabbat and during the week when I can. I'm being me, and I'm happy. That's a good mom.

We, as moms, need to stop inventing definitions of what we are supposed to be, and start being who we already are. It's much easier and more natural. And when you are just being you with your kids, it will resonate as sincere and real with them. Kids have a way of seeing right through us. They know when we're putting on an act. Learn about yourself. Allow yourself to indulge in a couple of things you enjoy. You have always loved to read. Make a little time for that. Tell your kids about the books you are reading. Maybe instead of reading to them, you can all cuddle up with your own books, and then tell each other the stories. Do what works for you.

In this book, I am trying to give you some stepping stones so that you can stop feeling so overwhelmed and start truly enjoying your children. But I'm not you. I can only take you so far. Once you are feeling more confident and actually like being with your children, (admit it, sometimes you'd rather not be with them) you can learn the ways that you enjoy your children. Whether it's playing at the park or chatting over an afternoon snack with them, do things with them that you enjoy. Share yourself with them, the real you. They will love you for it.

You don't have to be perfect

The first book I ever published was about this very thing. You don't have to be a perfect mom. Actually, you can't be a perfect mom. It's just not going to happen. We all make mistakes. We all do stupid things. We all get mad sometimes. This can overwhelm you with guilt. But you need to leave yesterday in the past. The key to being a good mom is showing up everyday. When I was younger, there was a huge movement among parents, particularly parents that worked outside the home, to make sure they had quality time with their kids. They would take their kids to museums or paint pictures with them. This was all good in theory. But in reality, I was the babysitter actually spending time with their kids while they fulfilled job obligations or went out on date nights with their spouse. Kids want quantity time, not quality. Just be there for them. That will more than make up for the mistakes you will make.

I have to take a minute to review here. This chapter is so important that I want to make sure you get it. First, every mom has her struggles. Second, you are not like any other mom, and comparing yourself to them will just waste time. Be you. Third, get used to being less than perfect. It's just part of living on this crazy, mixed-up earth. You get up in the morning, do your best, and at the end of the day, you thank God your kids are still alive and you have a comfy bed to fall into. Well, you thought you had a comfy bed, but you forgot you covered it with the clean laundry you didn't put away. Now you have to tend to it with the light from your phone because the baby is asleep on the other side of the room. See, not perfect! I've had to put laundry away in the dark, too. It's okay.

*The key to being a good mom is
showing up everyday.*

Go easy on yourself. You're doing a great job most of the time, and that tends to make up for the days that don't go so well. Sometimes you are sick and tired or your kids are hanging off the ceiling not caring about your attempts to lovingly engage them. Please cut yourself some slack here. Put in a movie. Take a nap. Go sit outside while your kids run off some steam. You'll feel better soon, and can pull up your socks and go another round. Your kids can see you when you aren't all put together. It gives them a more realistic picture of family life. We don't live on a movie set. Life is real, and it's good for your kids to see you handle life as it comes the best you can. It prepares them to do the same thing when they grow up.

You are perfect for the job

This is the part in the movie where the music changes and everyone gets all sappy. This is the part where I say you are the perfect mom for your kids. Yes, it's a sappy thing to say, but it is absolutely true. God did not make a mistake when He gave you your children. He knows your personality. He knows the mistakes you have made and will make. And He gave you these kids anyway. He built right into you the ability to do this job. Moms know how to raise kids. They don't always realize it, but they have that instinct and drive to nurture that enables them to raise an infant into an adult. God gave you that ability. Men don't have that same wiring. They are built for a different job. That's why they have difficulty with things like diapers and look at you in awe. Enjoy that feeling. You got it!

It's funny how our kids have this one figured out, but we always seem to think someone else could do a better job. Your kids want their mommy and nobody else. They love you even when you get things wrong. And don't believe them when they say they hate you. They don't mean it. They are just spewing emotion all over everyone because they don't have complete control of themselves yet. Your children think you are the bestest, and you totally are! Dare to believe them and their opinion of you.

Fill yourself up

Everything I have suggested thus far has the potential to wear you out. Being a mom means you need to do a lot of giving when you don't feel like it. You need to get up in the night when you really want to sleep. You need to set aside what you were doing to pay attention to your child. If you aren't careful, you can start to feel bitter towards your children. That's why you need to take time to fill yourself up.

I used to travel all over the state teaching Bible clubs for children all summer. In the winter, I taught a Sunday School class. A wise mentor of mine taught me that you teach out of your overflow. You can't teach other people anything if you are all dried up yourself. The same goes for being a mom. You can't expect to keep dishing out the love to your kids if you don't feel loved yourself. You can't operate on an empty tank, because you gave the kids all the food. No, eating out of their bowls when they are done doesn't count. You need to care for you.

I have yet to figure out the whole sleep situation. I still get up in the middle of the night. I guess my body just got used to it after a few years. That, and I learned that it was okay to take a 15 minute nap in the afternoon. I stopped skipping lunch, though. Your dad would just shake his head when he discovered that I was shaking at 4 pm, because I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. I learned to make sure I sat down for a proper lunch.

I also started doing things that I enjoy. I love to write, so I started making time for that. Writing is a huge part of who I am and how I express myself. I would be less me, and probably more cranky, if I didn't take the time to write. You have to make these choices for yourself. You need to do your best to sleep. You need to make sure you eat at every meal, and make sure it's good food. You need to do things that interest you as a unique adult. These will help you to have the energy and fuel to be a good mom, and enjoy being with your kids.

These physical things will only take you so far, though. To choose to love your children in the way they need, you need to feel loved. You can't do this for yourself. Yes, you can love yourself, but that will only take you so far. You could depend on love from your husband or friends and family. But sometimes they will let you down. They don't mean to, but they are only human. They'll say something that hurts your feelings. They'll forget something that's important to you, like your birthday. As much as I love your dad, and he loves me, I don't depend on his love alone to keep me afloat.

So, where do I get this love from? I get it from my Heavenly Father. He never fails me. He created me and knows me better than I know myself. He doesn't forget my needs, in fact, He usually takes care of them before I know about them. How do I fill myself up with His love? I need to take the time to actively pursue a relationship with Him. I need to be talking to Him in prayer, and hearing from Him when I read Scripture. The beauty of this relationship is that it is unique for each person. Some people enjoy singing praise songs. I'm not really into that. But I do enjoy writing my prayers, kind of like writing letters to Him. You can develop this relationship in your own unique way, too.

The best advice I can give you is to read His word, and follow His instructions for living. We'll talk more about that later. As you live your life within His guidelines, you'll understand Him better. Tell Him about your day. Ask Him for help. He hears you, and He never lets you down.

You need to take the time to actively pursue a relationship with God. Talk to Him in prayer, and read His Word.

Taking care of yourself physically will do wonders for how you feel as a mom. Investing in your marriage gives you a built-in best friend and support system. Taking time to develop a relationship with God is irreplaceable. Nothing else will do more for you in your endeavor to enjoy motherhood. You see, as you embrace the fact that you were designed for motherhood, and can raise your children according to your personality and unique style, you have purpose. When you know that the Creator of the Universe cares about your struggles and victories as a mom, you can experience joy immeasurable.

End of chapter stuff

What have you learned so far? I bet when you started reading this book, you were feeling pretty overwhelmed. You were having five bad days for every two good days, or worse. You just wanted a break from your kids if you were going to hold on to that teacup sized amount of sanity. But look how far you have come! You can see your children as the amazing little people that they are. You delight in their little interruptions because you can share the experience of life with them. You might even feel good enough about this whole mommy thing to read to your kids every now and then. I know, don't push it, right? I hope you are getting a glimpse at how important your job is, and how enjoyable it can be. God says that children are a blessing, and my desire is for you to begin to see that in your children. It has to begin with you. It doesn't happen automatically.

So, go smile at your kids. Tease them with a silly game. Take a walk together. Breathe deeply knowing that you are the perfect mom for your kids. You were designed to do this job. You are unique and special and you don't have to raise your kids exactly like the neighbors or the magazine articles. You have the know how to decide what is best for you and your kids. Are you still reading this? Go hang out with your kids! The next chapter can wait. If you want a sneak peek, we'll be talking about how cool your kids are. That'll be super fun!

Chapter 5

Know thy children

A big part of enjoying motherhood is simply changing your perspective. You need to see yourself as the awesome mom that you are. As you feel more confident, you can begin building a lasting and meaningful relationship with your children. That's where the ten second and ten minute fixes come in. When you actively use those fixes, you are choosing to spend time with your children and demonstrate to them that they are important to you. So don't stop using them when you finish reading the chapter. These are habits that you want to keep using for the long haul. Read to my teenagers? Yep, they'll love it.

As you spend time with your children, you will begin to appreciate how unique and different they are from you and from each other. Reading through “The Child Whisperer” will be very helpful in understanding why your children think and act the way they do. I again highly recommend it. Any tool that helps you understand your children's personality is very helpful in being a better mom for them. Children are so incredibly different from each other. Your brother had a driving force within him that caused him to plow through everything in front of him. Your other brother sat for hours on end looking at books and drawing pictures. I never understood when people would say, “Oh, that's just how boys are.” Umm, apparently you didn't have my boys. Get to know your kids. They are super cool little people that will make you smile and laugh. Take the time to enjoy their individuality.

Encourage your children's interests

When your children are little, it's hard to see any interests. Well, they do have some interests, like knocking over blocks, throwing things, painting themselves with their food, and pouring all the bathwater all over the floor. But as they crawl out of toddlerhood, they will have things they like to do, and favorite books to look at. Your little brother has had an obsession with dinosaurs for years now, and he's only six. You took a little longer to find your passion, but once we brought those four ducks home for you kids to play with, you were smitten and have been ever since.

When your children show an interest in something, feed it a bit. Find books about their favorite topic. Look for opportunities to learn about their “topic” outside the home. Learn along with them. All seven of you did your best learning outside of the school books. You loved to explore outside and look at books you found downstairs. When kids are interested, they learn. Period. This is the stuff they will remember, too. Give them plenty of opportunities for free range learning, and they will amaze you with what they know.

As they grow older, they will develop interests that might eventually become careers and life pursuits, and it all started when they were three and you let them play in mud puddles. Give them freedom to use their imaginations and pursue their interests. They are each unique and have wonderful gifts to offer the world. Oh, and by the way, they won't have your dreams, visions, and interests. Let them be different from you. If you have unfulfilled wishes and dreams, take care of them in your own life. Don't force your desires on your children. Let them have their own.

*Give them freedom to use their imaginations
and pursue their interests.*

Recognize their feelings

We've talked a lot about your feelings as a mom. You can feel overwhelmed and frustrated. You can feel joy and peace. You can love your children with all your being and want to hide in the bathroom five minutes later. You can even feel angry. Your children can feel all these emotions, too. Since we are technically in a position of power over our children, it's easy to use that power to try to control their emotions. We tell them to settle down, or stop crying. We discipline them for losing their temper. We refuse to give them the same amount of emotional freedom that we expect for ourselves. I'm not blaming anyone, because honestly, I don't think we even see what we are doing. We think we are teaching our children right and wrong and the importance of obedience, but in the process, we are forbidding them to express their emotions in a healthy way.

Let's take a look at what extreme control of emotions would look like if exercised on an adult. You wake up in the morning, a bit earlier than you would like. You feel a bit cranky and tired. You are immediately reprimanded for feeling cranky because that is a selfish act. You try desperately to smile to avoid further conflict. You get distracted and swing your hand into a wall. It hurts! You scream and curse. You are comforted for 3.7 seconds and then told to get over it. You try having a conversation with another adult. They say something mean to you. You start to cry because it's just turning out to be a horrible day. You are called a baby for crying. You are feeling completely overwhelmed and misunderstood so you stamp your foot. You are disciplined for throwing a fit. And on it goes. Do you see how you were given no safe outlet for expressing your negative emotions? This is not teaching control. This is exerting control over someone who is not at a developmental age to exercise that kind of control.

Sometimes we treat our children this way and we don't even realize it. Let's take the previous scenario and put a child in it with a parent that understands the need for safely expressing emotions. Your child wakes up too early and is tired and cranky. You could offer to sit with them for a few minutes, just to snuggle. You don't have to say anything, just hold them. It won't be long before they feel better prepared to handle the day. They might even feel up to a smile. Then they run off to play and swing their hand into the wall. You acknowledge their pain, give it a kiss, and reassure them that it will feel better in just a minute. They feel comforted and loved, so they go off to play with a sibling. The other child is mean to them, so they start to cry. You deal with the situation by talking to both of them to get the full picture. The other child might be feeling frustrated, too.

You can acknowledge that and then teach them the correct way to express frustration, rather than taking it out on their sibling. Teach them to sit with a book until they calm down, or some other technique where they can calm down without hurting others. They can be encouraged to come share their problems with you before they are tempted to spew their frustration on others. I always had you hug and apologize when you were mad at each other. If you weren't ready to give them a hug, I knew you were still harboring mad feelings. All this takes a lot longer than simply yelling at them for expressing anger or crankiness. But it respects them as the little people that they are. It teaches them gently how to express their emotions in a way that doesn't hurt other people. It shows them how to fix relationship problems. As you consistently teach them, they will get better at it. Before you know it, you will have a more peaceful house, because they have learned a bit of what you are trying to teach them.

Teach them to sit with a book until they calm down, so they aren't hurting others.

I didn't always succeed, but my goal was to have a home where everyone is important, and everyone has legitimate opinions and feelings. We need to learn to give each other some space. We can't expect everyone to be understanding of our mood swings and then yell at our kids for being in a bad mood. There is a better way. Show them love and care. Teach them little tricks to improve their mood. Anyone know where your smile is? If you can learn to smile first, so can they. But it takes a bit of patience and love to guide your children to that point.

Your brother went through quite a long phase where he would resort to screaming or growling if things did not go the way he envisioned them going. We told him he could feel frustrated in his room. That was a safe place to feel emotions, but he didn't bring the whole house down in the process. He was given time to calm himself, and then in a few minutes, I could go in and talk to him. If we could get to the source of the problem, I could get him to switch his thinking to problem solving, rather than a woe is me attitude. If we can encourage our children to communicate the problem to us, we can help them find a solution.

These are skills that, unfortunately, many adults don't have. They have learned to either repress their emotions or blow up like a nuclear bomb whenever someone offends them. We want to teach our children a happy medium. We respect the way other people feel. We give them some space. We pull ourselves out of a situation before it gets emotionally out of control. We try to communicate the problem so that we can work together to find a solution.

We need to teach our children skills for handling emotions and communicating effectively with others.

What does that have to do with enjoying motherhood? If you put in the effort to not only recognize your children's emotional needs, but teach them the proper use of those emotions, you will eventually have a calmer, happier home. You will enjoy being in your home that much more. By the way, as you teach your children to have good emotional health and communication skills, you will develop those skills yourself. Goodbye, repressed emotions. Goodbye, frustration because no one knows what is bothering me. Doesn't that feel better?

End of chapter stuff

Your children are little gifts. They will keep you guessing, but in a good way! Take the time to get to know them. It will be well worth your effort, like unwrapping a present. I love spending each day with you guys. You each make me laugh, or think, or appreciate how amazing you are. You are good at things that I am not. Your sister is way more athletic than I am even when I'm dreaming. You are so focused and determined with your ducks. Your brother is constantly acting silly and making me laugh. He has an incredible sense of humor. Your sister has a sweetness about her and a beautiful smile. Your little brothers are all crazy, it's hard to avoid that simple truth. But they all have their charms as well.

Find the unique beauty in each of your children. Embrace it. Laugh with them. Let their smiles warm you up inside. I know being a mom is hard. I know sometimes you want to cry. But it's at those moments that they sneak a little fart and give you a lopsided grin. Don't fight it. If you can't beat them, join them. If you can let go of this idea that you are always supposed to be in charge and in control, you can get right in there and enjoy them. Enjoy their quirks, their strengths and their weaknesses. Kids are awesome! This is the blessing waiting for those moms that choose to enjoy the ride.

Yeah, I know we can't party with our kids all the time. Someone has to do the laundry. We'll go over the behind the scenes stuff in the next chapter. After all, who can enjoy themselves in a perpetual pile of chaos?

Chapter 6

The time and space continuum

I know this chapter has the potential to become a book unto itself. But, I want to give you just enough help in the homemaking department to keep you feeling pleasant and free to enjoy your children, which is what this book is all about. I will never in a million years claim to be an expert in this department. Just ask my mother or your dad. But I have learned enough to keep a household of seven children, two parents and a grandma running smoothly. So, let's take a look at some of my tips. Yes, I know you can do them better and probably will, but just let me have my moment in the spotlight, okay?

You are not behind

I remember having a particularly rough day. It was probably 11 am and I was still in my bathrobe wandering around the house feeling totally overwhelmed. The dishes were piled up. The laundry was piled up. The dirt on the floor was piled up. My anxiety and overwhelming sense of doom was piled up. Man, everything was piled up. I felt so behind, and the worst part was, I didn't even know where to start.

Just do the next thing in front of you, then the next, and the next.

The phone rang. It was an older friend of mine. I used to babysit her kids. I told her how I was so behind on my day, and couldn't seem to get caught up. She simply said in her ever cheerful way, "You aren't behind. You are right where you are." That statement was revolutionary to my thinking, and years later, I still say it to myself when I am tempted to feel behind. You are never behind. There is always a task in front of you that can be accomplished and put you closer to your goal. What is your goal again? To get those pesky dishes off the table, washed and put away so you could see your kids across the table.

When you are surrounded by chaos, just do the next thing in front of you. Can you get to the washing machine? Start by putting a load in. That was fast, and made some more room for you. Can you load or unload the dishwasher? Tackle that. If you always see yourself at the beginning of a journey to freedom, then all you have to do is take a step closer to your goal. Also, when you see homemaking as a little journey, you are free to rest on the side of the path for a few minutes and chat with your little fellow travelers. They like it when mom pays attention to them. It helps them to enjoy you. Then you can do the next thing in front of you again. Before you know it, you will have risen above the chaos and restored some order to your little corner of the world. That's an important task, because everyone feels a bit more at ease and less cranky when their home is tidied up. Remember, your goal is not a clean house per se. It's creating an environment where your family can enjoy each other comfortably. That's worth cleaning for.

*You aren't behind. You are right
where you are.*

Get rid of the extras

We live in a society of excess. I always wanted to buy that book where the photographer traveled all over the world. He had families put all their belongings on the ground in front of their house and took their picture. The American family filled the yard with their stuff and then listed everything that wouldn't fit down the side of the page. Now, that is just ridiculous! I'm ashamed to say that I wouldn't do much better. We need to get rid of what we don't need. It bogs us down and robs us of the freedom to just enjoy life. Again, homemaking is a means to an end, not a goal in itself. We want to have room to play and read and relax. We want to have time to chat and read together. If our lives and homes are full of excess, we can't do that, at least not without added stress.

First, you should look at your stuff. If you don't use it, get rid of it. If you don't love looking at it every day, get rid of it. You might be looking around you and justifying everything you own. I understand. There will come a day. On that day, anything that isn't nailed to the house might find it's way to your front lawn in a big heap. You will suddenly have this irresistible need to purge your house of all the stuff. Give me a call when it happens. We'll celebrate together. It's a good feeling to come to the point where you are ready to let go of things. When you do, there is more room for people. They are what's really important. When you can see your kids instead of the toys, you can get to know them better. You can smile and laugh with them. And on it goes. Funny! I just had this funny memory pop in my mind. When I was a kid, we used to bury each other in our stuffed animals and take pictures. You could only see our faces popping out. Anywho....

*If you don't love looking at it everyday,
get rid of it.*

Get rid of some stuff! You'll feel better! There are tons of methods out there to help you with the actual process. You helped me get rid of stuff and donate it when you were younger. Remember when we would put all your clothes in a huge mountain in the middle of the living room? You would climb on top of it and try to touch the ceiling. Then we would count off a certain number of shirts, skirts, etc. The rest got donated. The point is to do it. Moving on.

Did you know your time can be full of extra stuff, too? Sometimes we overcommit, it's as simple as that. Do you find that you are running out of the house more than you are home? This is going to affect you as a mother. If your kids are always strapped into a carseat behind you, it's hard to get to know them, and as a result, enjoy them. It's also not much fun for your kids to have to take their naps slumped over in a carseat. Just sayin'. If you are home and following somewhat of a routine, your days will run smoother. When days run smoother, everyone's mood will run smoother. That makes for a happier mom and happier children. Which, you guessed it, equals potential for more enjoyment.

Learn to say no to the extra stuff. Value your time at home and protect it. I like to keep my errands and appointments on Mondays. Then I hopefully have the rest of the week to just stay home, help you kids with school, do laundry, and write. When I go out, even if only for a couple hours, the rest of the day gets thrown off-kilter. This also goes back to you recognizing your personality and energy type. Are you an extrovert that enjoys being out with people more? Great! But don't get selfish and drag your kids around with you when they would do much better at home where it is quiet. The majority of your quality time with your children will be at home, so make sure you are actually spending time there.

You may not realize it, but you also may be doing extra chores. Don't get me wrong. Chores are great! A clean house is worth the effort that goes into it. But, when you have little ones, some chores can be done less often or not at all. Diapers and baby food and potty training take plenty of time and energy. They are also absolutely essential. Washing the baseboards is not. Think through what chores are absolute necessities to keep your home operating. Clean dishes and laundry, fresh beds, swept floors, and good, wholesome food in the fridge are pretty important. Focus on the must-dos first. Then you can occasionally add extra jobs like cleaning ceiling fans when you have extra time.

Learn to do small parts of a job while you are in the appropriate room for something else. Are you watching a toddler take a bath? Wipe the counter, scrub the toilet and hang fresh towels. You're in the room already, and those jobs altogether take about 3 minutes. Are you waiting for water to boil in the kitchen? Wipe the counters, load the dishwasher, and collect trash that always distributes itself all over the room. Double duty can totally work in your favor when you are tired or overwhelmed. Remember that a clean house is not the goal. It helps us reach our goal of enjoying our children in a peaceful environment. One more double duty tip that I use regularly: When someone drops an ice cube on the floor and it melts, grab the mop. You just mopped up the muddy footprints your toddler brought in at lunchtime! Win! Win!

Be realistic about how clean you expect your house to be when you have little ones.

Use a timer

Highlight that right there! That is my best piece of advice ever. I could have called this book “Be nice to your kids and use a timer.” Okay, that’s a bit dramatic, but using a timer has been an incredible game changer for me. I am sure it will be for you, too. I was having issues with my legs hurting if I sat too long, or was on my feet too long. So I started using a timer. I only sit for about 30 minutes. Then I get up and switch the laundry or load the dishwasher. By switching back and forth between the two, I feel better, and I get a lot more done. Somehow, when you know you only have to work for a certain amount of time, you feel more motivated. You are willing to tackle the out of control kitchen because you know you can walk away in twenty minutes.

Once you get good at working for a certain amount of time, you can actually make a list of tasks that can be completed in a certain amount of time. Sweeping is a much faster task than you realize, for example. I know, when you don’t want to do it, it takes like three hours and when you’re done, it doesn’t look like you swept because more dirt moved into the vacancy. Wait! That was me watching your brothers sweep. They were so slow.

Next time you are having a slow day, bring out the timer, and set it for 15 minutes. Then get to work. You will be amazed at how much you get done in such a short time. You actually find yourself racing against the clock, which is very cool. Then when the timer goes off, set it again, only this time spend it cuddling with your kids on the couch. See, I knew you didn’t think a timer would help you enjoy your kids more. Fooled ya!

*Be nice to your kids, and use a
timer!*

Stay at home more

I touched on this a page or two back, but I want to reiterate it here. You need to stay at home more. You are working so hard to develop a relationship with your children. You are learning to enjoy them, and improve everyone's moods on the bad days. You are learning to be more efficient at homekeeping so you don't have chores constantly hanging over your head. Now, stay in this wonderful atmosphere you have created and enjoy it! I love being able to just sit and relax in a clean room with a book. It's a wonderful feeling, and it gives me a great sense of peace. Yeah, sometimes in the back of my mind, I'm thinking, "I can't really have everything done. What on earth am I forgetting? Should I be sitting here, or should I just take a nap to catch up on my sleep?" Ok, so it's not always that peaceful, but still! Stay home and enjoy your kiddos and this lovely palace of an environment you have created.

You know what else is cool about staying at home? You can watch your children grow and learn. You can help them learn to ride a bike and watch them learn to do tricks on it. You can teach your six year old how to scramble his own eggs because you're sick of making them. Sure, he'll get a shell in the bowl and it'll take five minutes to fish it out. But you're cool with that, because you're learning to enjoy your children. When you're at home, you can watch your toddler run across the living room and back and then say, "Again, mommy?"

These are the things that a good life is made of. Sure, life has its' difficulties, its' tragedies, its' lean times, but if you can learn to keep your home and family at the center of your world, you'll be just fine.

*Make your home and family the center
of your world.*

I have seen moms who spent their single years going out regularly for food and entertainment. When they have children, they continue to leave the home just as often. Their children spend their days in carseats eating fast food. Then these same moms wonder why their teenagers want nothing to do with family life. They have been trained that home is boring.

We stayed at home a lot when you were kids. I guess I was just following my mom's example. I stayed at home a lot when I was a kid, too. As a result, I got along well with my siblings and still have strong connections with my family. I wanted the same for you and your siblings. You definitely had your tiffs, and sometimes even a scream fest. But compared to some of the kids I babysat, you guys got along famously. Do the same for your children. Make home the biggest part of their day. Take them to the park. Do the grocery shopping. But make home the place that you are happy to come home to and put your feet up. Make it the place you want to be.

Mess is relative

Yes, I did just say that. Mess is relative. There are as many definitions of clean versus mess as there are people in the world. I have met moms that have an absolutely immaculate house. Even then, they are apologizing for the “mess.” There are other moms that let their kids do crafts all day and they can't find the dining room table for dinner. They obviously have different definitions of mess. My point here is that you define clean and mess for yourself and then uphold that standard the best you can.

The Bible teaches us to make sure our homes and property are safe. That is my number one priority. Stuff, especially slippery stuff like paper, is a huge hazard on the floor. Yes, I know this from experience. Before you start worrying about details, keep your home safe, and teach your children what this means.

We have been blessed with belongings and we should care for them. That is something I did not teach you guys as quickly as I should have. Yes, things wear out. But I didn't teach you things like putting your clothes in the wash while I could still get the mud out. So they wore out faster. Your brothers went through phases where they wanted to wear the same clothes every day. I had to make them change their clothes so I could wash them.

The other standard I feel is essential, is being able to find things. There are few things that frustrate me more than not being able to find something I need. I actually lost my car keys once. I searched the whole house and couldn't find them for a week. Obviously they were on the property because I managed to drive the car home. But I could not find them anywhere. A week later, I was loading the washing machine and found them in my apron pocket! I don't even wear aprons that often! Do your best to have a place to keep things. It'll make you a happier person.

Don't compare your mess to other people's mess. Keep your home safe, organized, and cared for. Then get busy enjoying your family. You won't get to the end of your life and wish you had washed the tub just a few more times. You will wish you had spent more time with your kids. So, keep your home clean and safe with the end goal of enjoying your children and husband more.

Write it down

I am a huge fan of making lists. I admit that I always laughed when your Gramma would write her list on a little scrap of paper and then lose the paper. That system would never work for me. So I use a planner or journal of some type to keep track of everything. I have a running calender, and then daily lists to plan out my day. I learned that you actually need to schedule things like spending time with your kids. Otherwise, you will always be thinking you should do something else instead of sitting outside with your kids.

There are lots of options you can take here, from simply making a to-do list every morning, to a 12 week plan where you journal and work toward a large goal every three months. That's what I'm currently using and loving it! Now, if I could figure out how to keep a running grocery list, I would be unstoppable! I just want you to find some way to plan out your day and what you need to get done. You should absolutely schedule time to just enjoy your kids, too. If it's on your to-do list, you totally have to do it, right?

I used to be pretty disorganized as a mom, which really is a shock to me. In elementary school, I made paper pockets and taped them to my desk to organize my scissors and such. The teacher even put me in charge of another student to help him be more organized. Somehow, when you throw a screaming little baby in the mix, all you can do is tread water, which is unfortunate because I can't swim. If you just followed that last thought, you get some bonus points. Anyway, over time, I learned the value of approaching a day with purpose. I fought it initially, because I didn't want to be rigid with my time. But, even the Bible teaches us to number our days. We should use those days wisely.

At first, your day might look pretty silly on paper.

- Get up
- Eat
- Play with baby
- Eat
- Laundry?
- Walk to mailbox
- Eat
- Sleep

The point is that you are writing it down and doing things on purpose. Do you see a theme here yet? When you started reading this book, you were living moment to moment, so I gave you ten second things to do to start enjoying your children. Then I gave you ten minute fixes. As you get in the habit of paying attention to your children and valuing them as little people, you won't feel so out of control. You'll learn more about yourself and how you like to interact with your kids. You'll understand their personalities and preferences. You have gotten rid of your junk and cleared the extras off your calendar. Now, it's time to look at each day as a gift and plan to use it wisely. I personally feel this is best done on paper.

Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to either get a notebook, or a simple planner from the store. Every night, take just a couple of minutes and plan for the next day on paper. Do you have an appointment? Do you need to write down a grocery list? Do you have to do laundry or pay a bill? Write it down in your notebook. Now, where can you purposely include your children to spend time with them? Can your toddler help you fold laundry? Can you pack a book to read with your child in the waiting room? Look for ways to use your day to enjoy your children and write it down. We are only given so many hours, and it's up to us to use them purposefully for what is important. Otherwise, you might find yourself wandering aimlessly around the house, trying to figure out what you're supposed to be doing. You might even ask your kids where the baby is and they'll respond with, "Mom, you're holding him!" Okay, maybe it won't be that bad, but you never know! Best to write things down.

Are you forgetting things? Start consistently writing them down.

Prioritize

This tip is a natural continuation from the last point. We need to plan how we will use our day. We should probably do it on paper. Loose plans are usually best, because life has a way of happening not according to our plans. As you get in the habit of writing down your plans for each day, you will probably discover that you get overly optimistic about what you can fit in a day. You'll write twenty things on your to-do list and actually complete two. Then, you'll feel lousy and get cranky and take it out on your kids. It'll get ugly real fast. How do we prevent this?

Prioritize how you spend your time, and get rid of the rest. This is where you have to think bigger than the next five minutes. What is really important to you? How badly do you want to develop meaningful relationships with your kids and spouse? If your daily plan is leaving them out of the equation too much, you need to change something. "I'm so glad I did one million loads of laundry and ignored my kids," said no one, ever. Do the laundry. Keep the house tidy and safe, like we talked about earlier. But make sure people are always at the top of your list. Because this can be difficult, I recommend keeping your list short, ten items max. If you need to be out of the house, protect the time you will be at home. Don't spend half the day grocery shopping, and then do a marathon cleaning when you get home, and realize at ten pm that you don't even remember what your kids were wearing.

In other words, balance your days between accomplishing tasks and building relationships. Yes, these can overlap, as I mentioned earlier. Your kids can help with chores. You can talk to your kids about cool stuff like dinosaurs while riding in the car, and you should totally talk about dinosaurs, at least occasionally. Prioritize people first!

Life will change in a split second and your day won't always go as planned. That's okay! That's just how life works. I want you to learn to be purposeful, so that you can make the most of the time you have with your children. The cool part is that as you learn to enjoy your children, it will become natural to include them in your day as much as possible. They love you and just want to be with you. Put it on your list to spend time with them.

First A, then B

I'm including this tip just because it's one of those cool things that you figure out and wish you had figured out ages before. It's so simple and in your face, but until you use it consistently, it won't impress you. I call this tip “first A, then B.”

The concept is simple. Before B (a cool event that kids love) can happen, A (a chore or other necessary task) must be completed. I was extremely easy-going and laid-back as a mom for several years. Yeah, I felt good and didn't work very hard. But my home was often out of control, and things just didn't get done. Your dad would come home frustrated because he felt like he was entering a warzone. The worst part was, I was giving you a terrible example to follow. Your rooms were messy. Baths weren't getting done. You get the picture. I refuse to disclose any more information at this time.

Then I figured out “first A, then B.” I created a short list of tasks that had to be done before we could watch a movie in the evening. The kitchen jobs had to be done. The assigned people for that day had to take a bath. We had to have a family Bible reading time. Then we could watch a movie. This has worked so well that I have a whole series of lists that have to be done by certain checkpoints. Math has to be done before you can eat dinner. Rooms have to be inspected before movie time. And on goes the list.

Now, the house isn't always clean, but we can get it there pretty fast. Schoolwork is getting done faithfully. Hey, I've even got a working bath schedule so I don't have a bunch of muddy kids. Think for a minute on how this concept might benefit you. Your kids are still little, so they can't go do a kitchen job by themselves. But are you doing the fun stuff before the work gets done? Maybe you need to set up some checkpoints for yourself? I'll sit down for a cup of coffee after I unload the dishwasher in the morning, for example. Can you believe I didn't always have a dishwasher? I used to wash everything by hand, and, you guessed it. I never seemed to have all the dishes done. I love those helpers in the kitchen.

Here's your assignment. Think of some parts of your day that never seem to run smoothly. Do you have a hard time getting your toddler settled down for bed? Try making sure they brush teeth, go potty, get in jammies, and then they can pick one story for you to read to them. Remind them consistently that they can't get the story until the other jobs are done. This teaches kids the importance of work before play. Your dad was always better at that than me. It is so important to learn for ourselves, and to teach to our children. You see, when we do the work and then sit down to relax, we can truly relax. We aren't putting off that job that we have been avoiding. When your mind is free from guilt and procrastination, you can relax. You can recharge your mommy batteries. You can enjoy your children. It's a good thing.

End of chapter stuff

Yes, I keep writing “end of chapter stuff” because conclusion is just plain boring. What have we learned in this chapter? To sum it up, the more organized and efficient you are at maintaining order in your home and handling outside commitments, the more time you have for the important stuff, like playing with your kids or pursuing a hobby to help you be a more content and happy mommy. Let's look at all these tips in a list.

- You are not behind. You are right where you are. Don't look at what isn't done, and what should have been done. Just do the next thing in front of you and move forward.
- Get rid of the extras. This includes extra stuff, extra outside commitments, and extra chores around the house.
- Use a timer. You are at your best when you focus your energy for a shorter period of time. Set a timer for a rest period, too.
- Stay at home more. Learn to make your home and family life the center of your world. You can't enjoy your children if you aren't actually with them, or they are spending too much time in the back seat of your car.
- Mess is relative. Stop trying to keep up with another woman's standards. Focus on safety and being able to find things. With little ones, anything more than that is quite difficult to obtain, anyway.
- Write it down. Plan your day on paper to make sure essentials get done, and you are spending time with your children. Life happens, and the plan doesn't always work, but it's better to have a plan in place at the outset to help you live purposefully.
- Prioritize. When things aren't coming together, focus on the important things in life, like family, and let the other things go, at least for now.
- Use the “first A, then B” concept to help you create a flow in your day, and make sure work gets done before play.

I hope you will find these tools helpful as you seek to do this job of mothering well. I don't want you to stay in survival mode. I want you to own this all important job. Now, go enjoy your children. You've been reading long enough. We'll talk about creating memories with your family in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Creating memories

As a society, we have become very individualistic. We see only our present situation, and our immediate family. We don't see those that have gone before us, or those that will come after us. This is a real shame for several reasons. You see, we are a small part of the sweeping history of mankind. We have a place in the big picture. We are not living just for ourselves in the here and now. This self-centered view of history tends to produce selfish, short-sighted people who only look out for themselves. I hope by now that you are beginning to see that enjoying your children involves helping your children mature and continuing to mature as a mom.

First, in order to enjoy our children, we need to teach them to be decent, caring and friendly people. When we teach them concepts like respect and compassion, they are so much more enjoyable to be around. We'll talk about that idea more specifically in the next chapter. Second, we need to continue to grow and mature as moms. As much as we would like someone else to blame, much of the mood and atmosphere in the home is on us as moms. When we choose to put a smile on our faces, the rest of our family tends to reflect that back to us. When we choose to turn chores into a game, our kids want to join in. When we choose to put forth the effort, we will be rewarded with a more enjoyable home and family.

How can we help our children to see their special place in history? How can we teach them to think outside themselves and show compassion to their fellow man? As we create memories together as a family, and make connections to generations beyond our own, we help our children to feel like they are part of something bigger. They learn that their family has contributed something special to the world. They learn to value those who are older and those who are younger. Let's look at some more specifics.

Tell about family history

My parents taught us about our family history, and I found it all fascinating. We can trace our ancestors back to Roger Conant, the man responsible for founding Salem, Massachusetts after arriving there from England in 1623. He stayed for a while with the Pilgrims, also. We traveled around to several historic sites when I was a kid, and I felt so proud of my family. I do remember one time that I didn't get up fast enough and my family traveled around to several sites, and I got stuck sitting in a garage while my grandparents got their car fixed. But they did take me to the local library, which was a very cool place to go. Funny the things you remember from when you were a kid. Speaking of my grandparents, I called them Nana and Papa. Roger Conant was on Papa's side of the family. You might remember my Mom showing you a picture of the huge statue of Roger Conant in Salem, now right in front of the Witch Museum. A magazine wrote an article about Salem and connected Roger Conant with the Salem Witch Trials! He was dead before those trials happened. I remember that Nana wrote a letter to the magazine and set the record straight without any apology, and they published it!

Tell your children about their personal family history.

The point is, when you teach your children about their ancestors, they have a personal history to be proud of. They have people who went before them and accomplished things and made their way in the world. It shows your children that they can do the same. Often, we can tell our children entertaining little stories from our personal history. Your dad is proud of the fact that he has moonshiners in Kentucky among his ancestors. Your great grandmother grew up in a home with a dirt floor. She even swept it! Learn about the stories in your family and tell them to your children. This includes stories from your own life. Tell them how things were different when you were growing up. Tell them what you enjoyed doing as a child. They would be surprised at the toys you had and the things you did. You would probably be surprised that I had a swing hanging from a tree in the yard. My dad made it with a board and a big yellow rope. I spend hours swinging. I loved to get the rope all twisted up, and then let it uncoil so I would swirl around and get dizzy. Kids love to know where they come from and what life was like before them.

Take pictures

It occurred to me that pictures are handy in two ways. Children love to see pictures of their parents when they were little. They also love to see pictures of themselves when they were little. It can be hard for them to comprehend that they used to be a baby. When I was a kid, I loved to pull out the family photo albums and look at pictures of where we used to live or how we looked when we were little. I could sit there for hours remembering when those pictures were taken. I loved the pictures of my sisters and I when we buried ourselves in all our stuffed animals. You could only see our heads poking out between all the stuffed animals. Either we were really small or we owned way too many stuffed animals.

I also loved looking at what my parents used to look like. My favorite picture was my parents on their honeymoon. My mom was holding a flower in the woods with a cute short plaid mini skirt and dark flowing hair down to her waist. So pretty. Your children will love looking back on photo memories, too. I know some people may take this a bit far. They live life through the photo lens. They are so busy capturing memories on film that they aren't living the memories in the first place. You'll need to find the happy medium between enjoying your children and living in the moment and getting some pictures to look back on later.

When you have some pictures, it can be fun to make your little ones a little photo album of their own. They can learn to identify the people in the photos, even as babies. If you write the names next to the pictures, they get a headstart on learning the written names, too. Your older children will enjoy making various projects with their pictures, even hanging the pictures on the wall. This is just another part of helping your children see that they are part of a family. They belong in this bigger picture. They also see that life involves growth and change. We don't look the same as we did ten years ago, and that's okay. I'm sure that taking and looking at your family photos will be a great way to celebrate family and enjoy being with your children.

Showing children family photos helps them see that life involves growth and change.

Maintain family traditions

Just like teaching family history and taking pictures helps your children feel part of a bigger picture, having family traditions gives them a sense of belonging as well. I'll talk about our Biblical beliefs more in chapter 8, but I'd like to talk about our traditions now. We keep the seventh day Sabbath and the feasts described in Leviticus 23. These have been such a wonderful opportunity to develop family traditions that we can enjoy every year. Left on my own, I am horrible about parties and celebrations in general. I get all these great ideas, make plans, pick special food to make, and when the day actually comes, I'm lucky to get dinner on the table. I guess I'm just party deficient. You kids would all get so disappointed with me because we didn't celebrate like I planned. I'm really sorry about that.

We did manage to do some traditions, though. Every week on Friday, we would get ready for Shabbat. Sometimes we would put a candle on the table. Dad and I sang blessings over you, and we got special dinner music. Dad made burritos for each of you to order, and tried to fill them up with so much love that you wouldn't be able to finish them. This was our way to welcome the Sabbath each week. I hope you find little ways like this to welcome Sabbath into your home, too.

We also did our best to celebrate the feast days each year, like Passover and Sukkot. Passover was always spent having a Seder meal with your grandparents to recount the story of the Exodus out of Egypt. I think that is what I love about celebrating the feast days each year. You not only know your personal family history, but you can see that your history goes right back into the Bible. You could see that God delivered the Israelites from Egypt and He's still the same God taking care of you. What a way to teach our children that they are special and important! By the way, He's the same God taking care of us moms, too. We can feel important, too.

Sukkot has been another pretty important tradition in our family. Every year, we move out into the pasture for a week to remember the time the Israelites spent in the wilderness. It has been a time of incredible family bonding since we spent the whole week without technology, just sitting out in nature enjoying each other's company. That's the one time all year that you got me to play games like tag and twenty questions. How can you go wrong sitting around a campfire cooking hot dogs? Sukkot was also a time when we learned that God could protect us, even without the permanent security of our house. The tent walls would blow in the wind and we could hear the rain on the roof, but we were still safe. God always protected us. What a great time to enjoy our children and teach them about a loving and protective Heavenly Father!

I will admit, though, that I still felt nervous being out in the pasture with the animals nearby. One year, we had to keep ducking into buildings to avoid the big male goats stomping through camp. Another year, I was trying hard not to freak out while a horse was standing two feet from the picnic table. I'm glad you guys all love animals, but I'll stay on the other side of the fence. Thank you very much!

The feast days are some awesome times to maintain traditions that not only bring you together as a family, but give you a sense of being part of a bigger plan, and the reassurance that God is taking care of all of you. As you draw closer together as a family, and closer to God, you will find greater enjoyment in your children. When we take time out of our regular schedule to enjoy special times together, we can't help but feel closer to our children as people and not just liabilities that we need to keep fed.

As you draw closer together as a family, and closer to God, you will find greater enjoyment in your children.

Don't forget about other traditions like birthdays and trips to the county fair. Give your children and yourself special events to look forward to. When you were younger, we spent a lot of time at home. It was a good thing, but as you grew older, we started doing special things like going to the fair or the beach, and it gave everyone something to look forward to. Again, any time you can be together as a family without the TV or computer, you will get to know each other better and see each other as unique individuals with awesome ideas. The more you see your children as interesting little people, the easier it is to truly enjoy being with them.

Do chores together

I know what you're thinking. What do chores have to do with creating memories, or even enjoying our children? Well, doing chores with your children is a great way to create memories and a great way to enjoy your children. Let me tell you how.

When I was a kid, we had a woodstove, and we had to get the firewood to feed that woodstove. Even when I was little, we all helped my dad get the firewood ready for winter. He used the chainsaw to cut the long logs to length and put them in a big pile. Our job was to carry the wood behind the house and stack it up to dry and be ready for when we would need it. My dad would encourage us to try to carry three or four pieces at a time, and we would feel so important and helpful. I remember seeing him rearrange the logs we had stacked, and I asked him why. He said that he wanted to make sure the stack was good and secure so it wouldn't hurt his precious girls by falling. Those are wonderful memories, and to this day, I don't want any other heat than wood.

We had to get our firewood ready, too. Your dad ran the chainsaw, and we would all work together to stack the logs in a big wagon to bring them back to the house. I ran the log splitter for the bigger pieces and you all grabbed the littler pieces to fill the wagon. Once we got back to the house, we set up bucket brigades to get the logs from the wagon to the stack against the garage. We did two to three wagon loads a day, and dad and I were always so proud of you. Even at five or six years old, you would help at least a little. We would all be tired afterwards, but we knew that we had all helped to keep the family warm all winter.

That's a good feeling that even a child can understand. We want to feel useful. We want our work to mean something. Instead of trying to keep your child occupied with a game or a toy, try having them help you with a chore. Have them fold washcloths while you put the clothes away. Have them put the silverware in the dishwasher. Show them how to wipe the table while you clear the dirty dishes. Get them a little broom to help you clean up the dirt pile. Make sure you are working together. I often wanted to send you off to do a job by yourself. But it was always better when we did a job together. Working as a team is so much better. The shared company motivates us, whereas working alone kind of depresses us. Have your children alongside you as you work, even when they are little. They will learn to feel important as a working member of the family. They will learn that work can be fun, and many hands make light work. By doing chores together, your children will acquire life skills that will not only ease your frustration because a job will be done better, but also better prepare them for life "on the outside." These are important lessons for everyone to learn.

*Even children want their work to
mean something.*

Believe me, working together with someone makes incredible memories and binds your heart to them in a special way. When your dad and I met, my dad put him to work. It was his way of testing any interested guy to see if they could support his daughter. So, our time together before we were married was spent working on projects together. We still love to work on projects together. One time, your dad wanted to plant a bunch of little tiny maple trees. He had the shovel and I was dropping in the tiny trees. It started to rain, and I don't mean a little rain. It poured! We were having so much fun together that we just kept planting until we ran out of trees. We were so soaked that it seemed to take awhile for our skin to dry out! That is one of my favorite memories from when we were first married.

Make these memories with your kids! Work hard to finish a job together. Your children will learn to work, and you will learn to respect them and their ability to get a job done. Remember, a huge part of enjoying your children and your job as a mother is to see your children as valuable and unique little people with amazing gifts to offer the world. Sure, they have a lot to learn. Sure, they often make way more messes than they help to clean up. But, God helps us to look at the good times and create memories that help us to overlook the days where everything goes wrong. Just when we think we are at the end of our rope, we remember to ask our child to help us with a chore, and they do it! Better than that, they do a half way decent job, and we are able to be thankful for them once again. And we get all this from taking the time to work alongside our children. That's good stuff, right there!

Work hard to finish a job together. Your children will learn to work, and you will learn to respect them and their ability to get a job done.

Homeschooling

My sisters and I spent most of our education in public school. One day, my mother found out that homeschooling was legal in our state. It didn't take long to decide to pull us out of school and educate us at home. She actually became somewhat of a pilgrim in our area, the first to pull her kids out of school. I will always remember her initial thoughts on homeschooling. She felt like she got her kids back.

Think about that for a moment. You were blessed to always be homeschooled, but I was in high school when I started learning at home. I got on the bus before 8 am, and got home after 3 in the afternoon. I had to do homework after that. I stayed at home more than other kids, but I still was gone much more than I was home. When my sister and I were home all day, every day, my mom could take the time to get to know us all over again. I loved to talk about every single lesson with my mom, while my sister wanted to take a stack of books and hide in her room where it was quiet. In the winter, we cuddled up in my mom's big bed and did our lessons all together snuggled under the blankets. Homeschooling brought us together as a family.

I am so glad that we had the opportunity to start homeschooling you and your siblings right from the start. We were able to be together and learn together all the time. I could watch you develop your interests. You guys would share with me your excitement over finding a snakeskin outside. You would chatter on without taking a breath about the latest thing you learned about caring for ducks. You know things about birds that I never dreamed existed. But that's the beauty of homeschooling. We share the delights, struggles, and discoveries of learning all together as a family. I know of no better way to foster strong relationships between parent and child than spending everyday learning together.

If you want to truly enjoy your children throughout their childhood and beyond, you should seriously consider homeschooling. You have never known anything else, but some of your friends reading this might not be so sure. It's a huge leap, for sure, but there are few challenges so rewarding as teaching your children. You can't help but learn to enjoy them. Yes, there are challenges, and struggles, and I-want-to-pull-my-hair-out moments. But this is an investment in your children that cannot be underestimated. You just gotta do it, and that's all I have to say about that!

Extended family is important

I know this can be a touchy subject for some, but I want you to know that having extended family in a child's life is so important. I realize that having a relationship with grandparents and other relatives is not a reality in some families. Sometimes, they are no longer alive or are not living close. My maternal grandparents lived 900 miles away, and my other grandmother died when I was fourteen. Sometimes, due to differing opinions and unresolved conflicts, a relationship between extended family and our children just isn't going to happen. I understand, and it's a horrible situation to be in. I'd like to talk about the ideal situation first, and then present some alternatives so that children can still reap the multi-generational rewards.

The role of grandparent is mentioned more in Scripture than the role of parent.

You kids were abundantly blessed in this department. Gramma actually lived with us for more than half of every year. This created a unique dynamic for all of us. I learned how to co-exist with another woman in my house. You got to spend time with her everyday, from mealtimes to stories from her childhood, to her tutoring you in your math. Allowing our children to be exposed to another generation is an awesome opportunity. Life was very different when she was growing up. Life was different when she raised her kids. We have so much to learn from the generation that went before us. The beauty of encouraging relationships between our children and the older generation is that they teach us, and they learn a lot from us, too. Gramma was thrilled to help you with your math, because she knew it would keep her mind sharp, too.

My parents never lived with us, but we spent time with them whenever we could. My favorite time was driving to the beach every Saturday morning and spending a few hours with them all summer long. My mom also homeschooled us, so she always enjoyed seeing how each of you were progressing on your schoolwork, and what topic interested you currently. She was also there when each of you were born, which I think is pretty special.

Ideally, your children should be given opportunity to forge a friendship with their grandparents in their own way. Obviously, you have to use your head here. I had an uncle that went to jail and I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. I'm assuming you are confident with your relationship with extended family and are willing to extend that relationship to your children. If that's not the case, you can check out my alternatives.

*Life was different years ago, and
grandparents can tell the stories.*

Let them read books together. Encourage your children to listen to their grandparents' stories. Include them when your family enjoys special events. The Bible definitely encourages multi-generational families. It even talks about grandparents more than parents. Our parents can teach our children some amazing things, better than we can. We just have to loosen our grip a tiny bit to let other people have opportunity to teach our children from their life lessons.

What if all this sounds good, and you can't make it a reality for whatever reason? The multi-generational benefits can be had with people other than family. When I was a little girl, there were several older women in my life that had a wonderful influence on me. They were the “grandma figures” in my church growing up. They loved God and loved children. They read stories to us, sang songs, and gave us big hugs. Even when I was older, one of the women made a quilt for us as a wedding present, and another gave us a beautiful wedding cake. Look for people like that in your circle of friends that can give your children the feel of having a loving grandparent. As you find these people to include in your children's activities, be sure to teach your children respect for their elders. Teach them to give an older person their chair, and say ma'am and sir. These are important life lessons, and this is a great opportunity to teach them. And just think how proud you'll be when you watch your child saying “yes, ma'am” and brightening an older lady's day. Think how much you'll be enjoying your children then!

Teach your children to respect their elders by giving up their chair and saying ma'am and sir.

End of chapter stuff

I know, the stuff in this chapter was a bit more involved. If it seems overwhelming right now, that's okay. If you are still practicing looking at your children when they speak, then keep working on that. When you're ready, this chapter will be here. I encourage you to work on making memories with your family when you are ready. And you know what? That last sentence sounded kind of funny because you are making memories everyday. Each time you smile and laugh with your kids, you have made a memory. Each time you help your child to work through their emotions and find a place of peace again, you have made a memory. So, to rephrase, when you want to make more complicated memories with your family, they will be excited to take part.

Tell your children where they come from. Take pictures. Let them spend time with the generation that went before us. Enjoy special times like feast days, birthdays and Shabbat. Do chores together. If at all possible, find a way to homeschool. These are all ways to bind your hearts together as a family. The more you each feel like you belong in this family, the more enjoyable you all will be to be around. Yes, your children would like to enjoy you as a mom as much as you want to enjoy them as children.

In the next chapter, we'll spend a few minutes talking about why I feel the Bible should have a central place in families. See you there!

Chapter 8

Build a solid foundation

We tried very hard to use the Bible as the foundation for all that we did as a family. I want to talk about the importance of that solid foundation now. Some of the moms reading this might have no use for the Bible, and that is their choice. But I want to explain to you, as my daughter, why I think it is beneficial to teach your children to live by the principles in the Bible.

The Golden Rule

Many people might not realize that we have the Bible to thank for the golden rule. Way back at the beginning of the Bible we were told to love our neighbor as ourselves. Translated, that means, “Treat other people the way you want to be treated.” Whenever you and your siblings were beating each other up, or at least it seemed like it to me, I would ask a simple question. “Would you want to be treated that way?” When you borrowed a shirt without asking, or destroyed someone else's toy, or called someone a nasty name, I'd ask the same question. Usually, the answer was no.

*Treat other people the way you want
to be treated.*

I don't think we, as adults, ask ourselves this question often enough. We gossip, or act impatient in the checkout lane, or tell someone off in social media. We wouldn't want someone to treat us that way, yet we dish it out pretty freely. If we can learn to apply this principle in our family, and teach our children to live this way, it would be life changing. This is the basis of showing respect for our fellow human beings. We must begin by practicing this principle as moms. Yes, our children learn by example, and if they see us treating people with respect, they will learn to do the same.

For example, when you are behind someone in the checkout lane that insists on paying cash and can't find the right change, or keeps dropping things on the floor, you have a few choices. You can act impatient with rude little comments and posture yourself with arms crossed and eyes rolling. You can at least lighten the mood by joking that those pesky coins are hiding. Ideally, you would also offer help by picking things up or offering a quarter to make up the difference. No one wants to feel like they are the negative center of attention when they are having a bad day. Ease things up for them. You would want them to do the same for you.

Often, we get this right when we are out and about, but forget this principle when it's just us and our kids. We start making demands, pushing them aside, forbidding any display of emotion, and the list goes on. We don't treat our children the way we want to be treated. I'm not in a kid's brain at the moment, but I bet that as they are treated respectfully, they will like the feeling and want to treat others the same way. After all, the Bible also teaches us if we want to have friends, we should show ourselves friendly. We need to be the grown-up here, and show respect first.

Can you see how this Bible principle would help you to enjoy your children more? If you are seeking to treat them like little people with legitimate feelings and opinions, you will learn to enjoy them as little people. As they learn and grow, they will begin to show respect back. A home full of people that try to honor and respect one another is a happy, pleasant home.

This idea of showing respect for other people is one very important reason why we chose to raise you with the Bible as our cornerstone. The Bible is full of instruction on how to truly show love to other people. We wanted to raise you with plenty of know-how on how to treat people.

A solid foundation

Your dad and I were both raised in church, but we chose to go a different direction with you and your siblings. The church taught us many important things, like the golden rule I just talked about. Eventually we realized, though, that the church only presented us with half the picture. They didn't really emphasize the beginning of the Bible. We have chosen to teach you with a more complete foundation. We started with the "Torah," the first five books of the Bible. This lays a solid foundation of where we come from, and gives specific examples of how to have a relationship with God and how to treat our fellow man.

When we understand these concepts, the rest of the Bible makes more sense. Again, how does this help me enjoy my kids more? At the beginning of the Bible, we are taught that we were created by a loving God. What a sense of belonging that gives us! We were made with a purpose to brighten the world around us. Just a little secret here, people who feel like they have a purpose for living are much more enjoyable to be around. I'll give you a silly example.

Imagine a little boy that doesn't know why he's alive. His days are spent pushing boundaries and testing things to see if he can break them. He acts out of boredom. He says whatever he wants because it really doesn't matter. Extreme, perhaps, but extremes help us learn. Whereas, a little boy that has been taught that he was created for a special purpose and that people are valuable will see every day as an opportunity. He will smile at his mom, thankful for the relationship they share. He will enjoy looking at the flowers, amazed that some God out there designed and painted them. Again, extreme, but I have read many articles and research that show that children with a sense of belonging and purpose are happier and better adjusted to life. We feel that teaching you the Bible, particularly starting at the beginning, gives you these important elements.

Pray for your children

When you teach your children about a loving God, you can also pray to that God on behalf of your children and yourself. I have never been one to appreciate long and flowery prayers. My prayers have always been one sentence prayers at the moment. "God, please help me know what to do with this child right now!" Knowing that I have personal help from Someone stronger and way smarter than me, has always helped me feel a bit more confident. The more confident I feel, the more relaxed I am as a mom. Then I can enjoy my children and make choices that benefit all of us.

God is in this parenting journey with you. Ask Him for help.

I also prayed when I felt overwhelmed. I didn't have many outside friends, particularly when you all were little. Even if I did, I probably wouldn't have told them that I was struggling. I wanted people to think that I was doing a good job and knew what I was doing. I didn't want them to know that I had to clean raw egg off the floor and I hadn't bathed any of you in a week. Moms just don't want to admit those things. But I could always pray. God already knew about it anyway. And I never felt a judging, condescending gaze from Him. He just gave me encouragement to keep going through the rough days, and enjoy the precious moments along the way.

I hope you will learn the power and comfort to be found in prayer. Your Heavenly Father is there to hear you and encourage you. He is there to bring verses to mind to help you know what to do. He created you and loves you. He wants to hear from you. He gave you those children that are currently emptying the hampers all over the floor. He knows and understands both them and you better than you ever will, and He still loves you and your children. Talk to Him! Tell Him about your day and your struggles. He cares. And when you are done praying, go pick up all that laundry they dumped when you were praying. Make it a game and have your kids pretend to play basketball with the dirty clothes. See, don't you feel better already?

*He knows and understands both them
and you better than you ever will, and
He still loves you and your children.*

What about punishment?

I feel and have felt for a long time that physical punishment has no place in a loving relationship. But I didn't know if I had the freedom to act on that feeling. It is all that I and millions of other parents have ever been taught. I have studied and read, and I have come to the conclusion that Biblical parenting does not include physical punishment. We are called to raise children, individual people with incredible potential. We are not called to create little cookie cutter robots that obey our every command. My desire for each of you is that you fulfill the purpose God has for your life. You are all very different and have different abilities, strengths and interests. I want to enable you to make wise choices and think for yourself. If I am only looking for outward conformity, I am severely crippling you.

This is the topic of a whole 'nother book, which I plan to write someday, but for right now, I want to give you a quick overview of how you can raise your children in a positive and enjoyable way without negative, and particularly physical, punishment. If you haven't already, you will hear people throw verses from Proverbs around to say that you have to spank. After studying the Hebrew, I would have to disagree. I have included some excellent resources in the back of the book for you to research further. One is a book titled Biblical Parenting by Crystal Lutton. She gives an excellent Biblical explanation of the word “rod.” Many people assume that this word is referring to spanking, when in fact it is an authority figure teaching Biblical concepts to their children. Study it out in the Hebrew. I know you will be fascinated.

If you are only looking for outward conformity, you are severely crippling your children.

Many people want nothing to do with the Bible because they see it as very negative. I get that. What if we actually started following what the Bible says instead of what we have been taught the Bible says? What if Bible believing parents started raising their children with love, understanding, and a desire to teach principles for living? What would the world think of the Bible then? Would our children be more receptive to a God that loves and understands them, than they would be to an angry God that wants to punish them for every infraction? Are we giving our children a positive picture of their Heavenly Father, or are we being an example of unattainable rules and regulations? These are questions we need to ask ourselves if we are to not only raise children we enjoy, but help other parents to do the same.

If we don't spank our children, how do we keep them safe and keep order in the home? Good question. I'm going to teach you something that I have been using with your brothers. It seems counterintuitive, but it helps solve bigger problems than the immediate situation. When your brother gets upset and starts throwing a fit, rather than punishing him for the awful crime of having emotions, I hug him or hold him on my lap. You see, children want and need attention, just like adults. They are so desperate sometimes that they will take negative attention in the form of punishment. I think we can do better than that. Let's fill up their need for attention in positive and encouraging ways, and see if those attitudes don't improve. After all, don't you get a bit cranky when you feel like your husband isn't paying you enough attention? Maybe he should send you to your room when you feel cranky. I don't know about you, but I don't like that idea very much. No, we are grateful when he sees the need for a hug, or a chance to sit over a cup of coffee and chat. We can do the same for our children. Give them the positive attention that they so desperately need. Just save the coffee for yourself.

Yes, we need to teach them how to be safe and listen to directions. That can be done through repetition and even games. If we are teaching them a skill like looking both ways before crossing, we don't need to punish them if they don't remember everything the first time. If they are struggling to listen or obey safety instructions, we should keep them away from unsafe situations and continue to teach them. This goes back to a previous chapter where I encouraged you to stay home more. When our children are young, it is often best to keep them home in a safe environment while we train them on what to do in various situations. We can't expect a three year old to know how to handle things like safely crossing a parking lot without teaching and helping them first. Think of these situations as you teaching a skill, not them taking a driver's test at the age of four and getting punished if they fail.

Wow, all that to say, love your children. Make sure they feel loved. Give them the attention they need. Meet their emotional needs. When they are struggling with negative emotions, remember that you feel those pesky things, too. Help them to find safe ways to express their emotions, rather than punishing them for feeling angry or frustrated. Teach them to obey instructions to keep them safe. This doesn't have to be a negative experience, but can be taught in a light and fun way. Even games like "Red light, Green light" help children to follow instructions and stay safe out in the world. Now doesn't that sound more enjoyable than creating conflict with your child and punishing them for being immature and unskilled? Keep in mind that I was firm with you, and expected you to tow the line, but it was always with the goal of safety or helping you to mature into a responsible adult. I never wanted to sway to the extreme of permissiveness and letting you do whatever you want. That is not in your best interest. It's a balance of acceptance and expectation, not falling to the extremes of permissive or punitive methods.

What about sin? Weren't we born with a sin nature? Yes, that is what the Bible teaches. However, there is age appropriateness here. We often forget that we have 20 or 30 or more years of life experience in what is right and wrong, and expect our children to have the same understanding. We need to spend their childhood years teaching them the principles found in the Bible. We need to teach them right and wrong. We need to teach them to apologize when they hurt someone. We need to teach them to tell the truth and respect other people's property. Childhood is a place to learn right and wrong in a protected place with parental guidance. They can experience natural consequences for their actions through the filter of parental supervision. Life and its consequences will be tough enough when they grow up. Let's gently teach them the Bible and how to make wise choices throughout childhood in an age appropriate way. When they reach adulthood, they will have a good understanding of how life works and how their choices will affect not only them but the people around them.

Which brings me to my last point....

Morality provides a secure and fulfilling way to live

Biblical principles like the golden rule are simply a good way to live. Purposely hurting others and making selfish choices is not a good way to live. This is one of the main reasons we decided to raise all of you based on what the Bible teaches. We want you to have a good life. We want you to have a clear conscience and feel good about the choices you make. This is what happens when you are taught to honor your parents, be faithful to your spouse, return lost property, care for the poor, and tell the truth. These are all principles found in the Bible. In fact, all of those are found in the first five books called the Torah. We read through the first five books every year, a little each Shabbat. I hope you will carry that on with your own children.

We live in a backwards and upside-down world. Every day, we see news stories where victims are punished and criminals are accommodated. We need to give our children a solid understanding of right and wrong so they can recognize justice when they see it. It is so easy, even for adults, to be swayed by emotional arguments and persuasive media. Our children need to have truth and character in their lives if they are to stand for anything. I know you don't want your children to just meander through life, changing their mind with the weather. Take the time now to teach them the Bible. The Bible has already stood the test of time. It's principles hold up under scrutiny. It can be counted on to be relevant and accurate. The news and youtube videos have not been tested like the Bible has.

End of chapter stuff

I hope as you read this, you are seeing your children as the delightful little people that they are. You have learned to smile more, and even laugh! Even though we all have tough days as moms, like when our printer breaks in the middle of getting ready for the next school year and we didn't sleep well for what seems like the last ten years, we have good days, too! We remember to pull our kiddos up on our lap and give them a big hug. We are rewarded with their innocent sweetness. This gentler way of parenting isn't always easy, but we have the freedom to enjoy our children so much more!

This gentler way of parenting isn't always easy, but we have the freedom to enjoy our children so much more!

But how do we prepare our children for the future? How do we know they will do well in life and make good choices? Build their life on a solid foundation. Give them a clear measure of right and wrong based on Biblical definitions. Show them that a person of honor, honesty, integrity and generosity will be blessed. Give them a sense of belonging in a creation formed by the hands of a loving God. Teach them to honor and respect their fellow human beings. Show them that they can have a personal relationship with their Heavenly Father by having that relationship yourself. What greater joy can we have as parents than seeing our little people grow up to brighten the world in their own unique way? Talk about enjoying your children!

Well, that was pretty deep, but so important. In the last chapter, we are going to look beyond our babies and our five-year-olds and learn how to enjoy being a mom for the long haul. See you there!

Chapter 9

Think long term

This chapter won't be as long as some of the others, but I want to give you a bigger picture, just for a minute. Right now, it seems like you will never sleep through the night again, or get to sit down to a peaceful meal without a little kid burping in your face, but that day will come. What do you do then? That's what I want to end this book with.

Enjoy your husband

I know what you're thinking. This is supposed to be a book about enjoying motherhood. I hope that I have given you lots of great advice to help you in that department. I hope you will be more forgiving of yourself when you still feel stressed and overwhelmed and do a bit of screaming sometimes. I hope you have learned to cut yourself some slack and start again fresh tomorrow. But there is a missing component if you spend all your time trying to nail this mommy thing. You need to remember that, first, you are a wife.

It is super important to keep your marriage relationship healthy and growing.

You were in love with your husband before you became a mom. It is super important to keep that relationship healthy and growing. You see, it was just you and your husband in the beginning and it will just be you and your husband again someday. You don't want to wake up one day and look at that man in the bed next to you and realize that you don't really know him. Parenting is not a business relationship between two adults. It is two best friends taking on a huge and very rewarding task together. You will need to put in the effort to stay best friends, even when you are tired and feel ugly because you've been living in your pajamas.

Your dad and I based our marriage on friendship first. The romance and all that is super awesome, but when we had health problems or were just plain exhausted, we could always talk or be silly together. We simply enjoyed being together, whether we were working on a project or drinking coffee at the kitchen table. Find ways to just enjoy being with your husband. You'll be able to enjoy those silly little things long after active parenting is a thing of the past.

Let your children know that you and your husband are still in love. Give each other a hug and a kiss in the kitchen. Chase each other around a bit. Joke around together. Be excited when your husband calls on the phone. Greet him at the door when he comes home. When your children see that your relationship is solid, that gives them a great deal of security. When your children feel secure, you guessed it, they are more enjoyable to be around. Do you see how so many little elements in a family can help completely change the dynamics in the home? When everyone feels loved, secure, safe, and understood, they will be pleasant to spend time with.

When your children see that your relationship with your husband is solid, that gives them a great deal of security.

That goes for mommies, too. That is just another reason to invest in your marriage. You have needs, like adult conversation, that only another adult can meet. Your husband wants to be the one that you go to. Talk to him about something other than laundry. Ask him intelligent questions that require more than three words to answer. Enjoy his friendship and allow it to meet at least some of your emotional and social needs. When you feel loved and appreciated, you won't feel so strung out when you are with your little ones.

Remember, when your children are grown, and yes, they will eventually grow up, it'll just be you and your hubby. Make sure you have stayed closely connected with him all these years and the time alone with him will be an amazing reward after the long journey of many years of parenting.

You are raising children to become adults

The name of this chapter is to think long term. When your child is learning to use the potty, you aren't exactly thinking about them being adults someday. But it really is inevitable, or inebitable, as your dad always liked to pronounce it. That always made me laugh, and I eventually required him to say it wrong. Anyways, keep in mind that your children will not always stay young. This affects you in two ways. First, you will suddenly realize that your children will not always want to cuddle with you and read a story together. You may find yourself heading back to chapter two to make sure you enjoy every moment.

*Keep in mind that your children will
not always stay young.*

Second, I want you to realize that you need to guide your children to continue growing and maturing and entering the next stage of life. One day they will start school. One day they will make their own friends without your help. One day they will graduate from high school. Embrace each milestone and gently encourage them to press on towards the next goal. Your dad always said, "I'm not raising children, I'm raising adults." He enjoyed teaching you life skills and letting you help with jobs that you hadn't quite grown into yet. Funny thing, you always pushed yourself a bit to be able to do that job.

It's good to not only enjoy the stage your child is in, but look forward to the next one. All along the way, remember to allow your children to be individuals. They will develop different interests. They will learn new skills at a different pace than their siblings. It's all good. Just let them make their way in the world and enjoy the journey with them. Then someday, you can give this book to your children, so that they can learn to enjoy their children, too. Now, wasn't that corny, but true!

Encourage free thinking and independence

I decided early on that I did not want to raise robots and yes-men. I wanted children who could think for themselves and develop opinions and ideas to help those around them. I tried to give each of you a solid understanding of right and wrong and how to show honor and respect to fellow humans, as well as other living creatures. But I didn't want you to do something just because I said it should be done. I'm not referring to safety here. Sometimes a child definitely has to do what they are told without question. It could save their life. I'm talking about making choices and deciding what route to follow. I don't want to live your life for you. I want to be available as a guide and counsellor when you need me. As you headed into your teenage years, I felt the most important thing was to just keep the lines of communication open, and support you and your ideas in whatever way I could.

Many parents struggle with this idea. Perhaps they are afraid of letting go of the reins. When we teach our kids to ride a bicycle, we hold onto the seat and run behind you while you learn to balance. But there comes a moment when we let go and you keep going. Eventually you look back and we aren't there. We're standing back and waving, so proud of your accomplishments. A child's journey into adulthood should be the same way. As a parent, I hope you will feel confident that you have given your children a solid foundation, and that they are completely capable of making a difference in the world. I'd say that's a good stamp of approval that you not only enjoyed this journey with your children, but you enabled them to take their own journey. Ah, that's just sappy. I'll move on before we all start crying.

End of chapter stuff

Yes, I know that you are trying to read this chapter while hiding in the bathroom because your three-year-old is banging on the door begging for more cheese. I know you don't believe me that someday you will wish these days were here again. You'll miss the cuddles and the stories and the crazy things your kids did. But then you will see your children forging their own way in the world and that will be very awesome, too. Take this time to encourage them to make wise choices. Help them to truly value and honor people. As you watch them grow, let them develop their own ideas, even if their ideas don't always work out. Hopefully, they have learned not to be discouraged by those bumps in the road. This is what makes strong, independent, and compassionate adults.

When they are off on their own, it'll just be you and your husband again. If you keep that relationship alive and well while your kids are little, you will be rewarded with a friendship that will carry you through being grandparents together. Your marriage is definitely worth fighting for.

Quick Reference

I know we've covered a lot of ground. I've tried to give you the best stuff I've got for truly enjoying your children rather than surviving each day. I like to look at things all lined up and organized, so I'd like to give you a quick checklist of what I've shared. You can mark this chapter and flip to it when you need some reminders.

Ten Second Fixes

- Look your children in the eye.
- Smile!
- Put down your electronics.
- Ask them about their drawing, or creation, etc.
- Breathe, just breathe.
- Listen to them when they speak.
- Play little games with them.

Ten Minute Fixes

- Go outside when everyone is stressed.
- Watch them play.
- Color a picture together.
- Read to your kids more.
- Beware the phone!
- Be silly.

Love your children

- Practice compassion.
- Choose to love, even when it's difficult.
- Love is an action, not a feeling.
- Each day, decide to love.
- Write down what you love about them.

Know thyself

- You are not alone.
- You are unique.
- You are not perfect, and that's okay!
- You are perfect for the job of mom.

Know thy children

- Learn your children's personalities.
- Encourage your children's interests.
- Recognize their feelings.
- Teach them how to properly express their feelings.

The time and space continuum

- You are not behind.
- Get rid of the extra stuff, commitments, and chores.
- Use a timer.

- Stay at home more.
- Mess is relative.
- Write things down.
- Prioritize what needs to be done and what can wait.
- Use first A, then B to bring order to your day.

Creating memories

- Tell your children about their family history.
- Take pictures.
- Maintain family traditions.
- Do chores together as a family.
- Homeschooling promotes family bonding.
- Extended family is important.

Build a solid foundation

- Teach your children the golden rule.
- Give them a solid Scriptural foundation, to teach them right and wrong.
- Pray for your children.
- Avoid physical punishment when they misbehave. Instead, look for the source of the misbehavior and give them positive attention in generous doses.
- Morality provides a secure and fulfilling way to live.

Think long term

- Enjoy your husband.
- Remember that you are raising children to be adults.
- Encourage free thinking and independence.

Resource list

Bibliography

Ever After. Dir. Andy Tennant. 20th Century Fox, 1998.

Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Knost, L. R. Two Thousand Kisses a Day. Little Hearts Books, 2013.

Knost, L. R. Spare the Rod: The Heart of the Matter. 26 June, 2016 <<http://www.littleheartsbooks.com/2014/05/10/spare-the-rod-the-heart-of-the-matter-2/>>

Lutton, Crystal. Biblical Parenting. Salt Lake City: Millennial Mind Publishing, 2001.

Tuttle, Carol. The Child Whisperer. Live Your Truth Press, 2012

Some of our favorite books for reading

Arthur Scott Bailey – This is a series of books about animals for young children. One example is The Tale of Jolly Robin. These are available free online.

Beatrix Potter – She has always been one of my favorite children's authors, responsible for creating characters like Peter Rabbit and Jemima Puddleduck.

Holling Clancy Holling – He wrote several science and geography story books including classics like Pagoo and Paddle to the Sea.

James Herriott's Treasury for Children – This is a collection of stories from a British vet, very sweet and perfect for reading to young children.

Little Golden Books – This series of children's books has some real gems, like The Poky Little Puppy. You can often find them second hand.

L.M. Montgomery – She is one of my favorite authors for girls. She wrote the Anne of Green Gables series, among other imaginative books.

Scriptures – No matter what translation you choose to use, the Bible is always a good choice for reading to your children.

Thornton Burgess – Thornton Burgess wrote several books about animals, including Burgess' Bird Book for Children. All of his books make for enjoyable read alouds.

About the Author



Heidi Cooper has been married to her best friend, Doug, since 2000. They have seven children, so life is never boring. Life's journey has brought them to a farm in the country where they have created a personal zoo with ducks, chickens, sheep, rabbits, a donkey, a horse, a dog, and a cat. Heidi also enjoys providing healthy food for her family, learning about herbs, knitting, and researching school materials for her children to use as they homeschool.

She is passionate about learning Scripture and especially Torah, which is the foundation for all the rest of Scripture. She enjoys teaching it to her children, and wants to see Torah affect people's daily lives.

She graduated from the Institute for Children's Literature, and is currently pursuing various writing projects such as children's books and homeschool materials. She tries to be very real in her writing, and only write the materials that are first helpful for her own family.

Heidi also enjoys blogging at her website: www.torahfamilyliving.com. You can get to know her a bit better there.

Other books by Heidi Cooper

My First Torah – a children's version of each Torah portion, illustrated and perfect for reading aloud

The Children's Ketubah Project – a parenting book with a focus on making a written commitment to the task of parenting

Psalm 119 Copywork – learn Hebrew while copying this amazing psalm

Torah Portion Copywork Series – selected passages from each Torah portion, available in tracing, print and cursive

Bible Science Copywork – full of verses to copy, all about science topics

Torah portion writing prompts – prompts for older children based on the Torah portions

History notebook – a simple system for recording what children are learning in history, and systematically teaching them commands from Scripture

These can all be found at www.torahfamilyliving.com.

