

3 Things That Can Steal Your Joy as a Mom (and How to Get It Back)

When I became a mom, I had no idea the utter chaos that would ensue. Before I had children, I worked in an office for 10 years, sipping coffee at my desk and being ridiculously productive. Eight years ago, when I quit my job to stay home with my first child, I knew I was headed for a big change. But as a former babysitter extraordinaire, I figured I would thrive playing the role of “mommy.” Let’s just say, I wasn’t the rockstar I hoped I’d be.

When my oldest three kids were 4, 3 and 1, I hit a low point—mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I felt depleted. I wasn’t handling life well, and I wasn’t being the mommy I wanted to be. Psalm 127:3-4 (NIV) tells us of the high calling of motherhood, “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth.”

As mamas, God has placed these arrows in our hands to raise and guide and sharpen. Our duty is to help them know, love and serve God. As we aim them toward Jesus, He will use them in the world. Even though I’ve been called to this amazing task of raising children to God’s glory, at times, I have not found joy in it. Here are three joy-stealers I have to watch out for:

1. Self-criticism.

I’m a perfectionist. Throughout my life, this has led me to strive for excellence in order to get praise and feel valuable. Before I had kids, I felt like a competent person. I had a job I enjoyed and received regular feedback from coworkers on the value of my contributions. That was my happy

place.

Then I became a mom.

As much as I loved this little baby in my arms, he gave me no kudos. I would stumble through a whole day of doing mom tasks, and no one would tell me, "Good job!" My husband, Kevin, tried to be encouraging, but he couldn't understand the deep discouragement of seemingly accomplishing nothing but keeping the little humans alive. (Of course, I was doing so much more than that.)

I didn't understand why being a mom was so hard for me, which gave way to feelings of inadequacy and self-criticism. That voice inside said: *Why aren't you better at this? You should be nailing this, and you're not.* I didn't feel triumphant; and I certainly didn't feel joyful.

Even if you thrive at being a mommy, you probably still focus on your flaws sometimes. *Why can't I be more patient? Why can't I keep the house clean? Why can't I lose the baby weight?* Nothing steals joy faster than self-criticism.

2. Comparison.

As women, we love to compare ourselves to others, don't we? In the age of social media, we have more opportunity than ever before to see what other people are doing. As we look at them and their successes, we can feel like we don't measure up.

Last year, I volunteered in my daughter's kindergarten class. I marveled at how every child was different. Some attacked the academic portions immediately while others added artistic touches first. Some talked to their friends, while others were attentive to who at the table needed a pencil.

We recognize our children are different. So why would we expect, as moms, we would all excel in the same areas? Comparison isn't helpful because I compare my weaknesses to

another mommy's strengths. When I do that, I miss the areas where I'm excelling. For example, I can easily discuss spiritual concepts with my children and love to hear their thoughts. Those are good mom qualities! I miss them when I make comparisons.

3. Weariness.

The third thing that can steal joy is exhaustion. A recent study says that parents will be sleep deprived up to six years after having a child! We are talking about the long game here. Many times, I'm not a bad mom, I'm just a really, really tired one. That can steal my joy.

There's a verse that has come to mean a lot to me. It's words Jesus spoke in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I remember reading this at my most exhausted point and wondering if it even applied to me. How could God give me rest in this season? It seemed impossible. Then, I remembered His promises stand firm through all generations, and He will do what He says. So, rest had to be possible. God had more for me than living in this place of total exhaustion. I couldn't control my children's sleep patterns, but I could spend time with Jesus and find rest for my soul.

Grit and Grace

The season of being a mom to young children is a hard one. There isn't a quick fix to getting your joy back. Being a mom requires grit—to deal with the blowouts and manage the meltdowns.

But we can find joy in the struggle. One thing that restores joy is making the truth of God's Word our primary source

daily. Binge watching Netflix isn't going to give you the rest Jesus is talking about. Scrolling through social media won't lighten your load. Even your big wins as a mom won't be enough to sustain you on hard days. You need God's truth that He is with you, He loves and accepts You fully, He invites you to be more than a conqueror in the daily tasks of motherhood.

When I couldn't sit down for extended times in God's Word, I found other ways to work it in. I listened to the audio Bible while I was cleaning the kitchen in the morning. I wrote down favorite verses on index cards and posted them around the house. I listened to worship music on my phone while I was doing laundry. The more I filled up with Scripture, the more I felt empowered and equipped to be a good mom.

Choosing gratefulness is another thing that's helped restore my joy. Nothing can get me out of a pity party faster than thanking God for all He's given me. He has provided a home for me, my children, work I enjoy, friends and a supportive family. I have so many things to be thankful for. When I begin listing those things, sometimes God's goodness brings me to tears.

This mom thing is a pretty awesome deal—and there's tons of joy to be found in it, if we're looking. God has called you and equipped you to be the mommy to your children. Don't lose sight of the wonder of that. {eoa}

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