

3 Ways to Thrive in God While Raising Toddlers

I wish someone had told me years ago that the person who most needed grace in those early years with infants and toddlers was MYSELF. The baby and toddler years are TOUGH. They are very different from the early school years, though they too have their struggles. The toddler years are crazy, and we need different expectations of our parenting in those early years.

I was at peace for the first few months with a newborn—I knew those first months would be dominated by feeding issues and trying to get my child on a schedule. But I didn't realize that the survival mode I was in in those early months would actually go on for years. I thought I should be progressing faster than I was.

Part of my problem was that I had a number of friends with similarly aged daughters who communicated much faster with their mom than my boys did with me. The other problem was that my little ones did not take in a new environment by observation, but by exploration. I've noticed some little ones who hang back and observe in new environments. But my boys walked in a room, noticed a door, and start opening it and shutting it to figure out the hinges. How does that outlet work? What's a fire alarm? How does this thing I've never seen before taste? It was pure survival-mode in our home for a good four years.

Sure there was nurturing. There were training, correcting and management. But the overarching theme of it all was simply SURVIVAL.

As a mom finally out of that stage, I recognize the symptoms in my sisters in Christ right in the middle of it. Stress in our marriages. Stress in our friendships. And so much stress

just in our heads and hearts. In light of all that, I have a few points of advice I wish someone had shared with me.

1) Preach the gospel to yourself. You will not survive this stage without meditation on all God has said over you in Christ. Chances are your figure at this stage isn't going to help your identity. Your homemaking skills aren't going to help your identity. If you are relying on your external successes at this stage of life to give you meaning, you are sunk. But let this time, when you cannot keep up a facade, reveal your true heart, and then turn to God in that desperation. He has a good plan for your life, and part of that good plan are these years of simple survival nurturing your young children.

2) Read your Bible. I talked in my last post about this. God promises supernatural strength through His Word, and you KNOW right now you need supernatural strength. You may only have five minutes (even if you have more time, you likely don't have the brain power to process more than that). The Psalms bring me so much comfort at stressful seasons of life, primarily because the majority of the Psalms were written during stressful seasons in the psalmist's life. His cries to God echo mine in the stress of life, and God's answers to him always encourage me.

3) Don't let women at other stages of life pressure you with expectations of what you can accomplish at this stage. When your children are little, forget color-coordinated meals. It's OK if there's laundry in the basket or your bathroom needs cleaning. If you have a choice between doing dishes and taking a nap, use paper plates and take the nap. Rest helps so much with the stress of life at this stage. You will be better able to nurture your children and keep them safe if you've had a nap.

Eventually, you'll emerge from this stage. Your children will

start communicating with you. They will reach a point developmentally where you can start communicating the essence of gospel grace to them. But you'll never communicate it to them until you first get it for yourself. And the early years with infants and toddlers, as we are stripped of our abilities to do for ourselves what we once easily did, are a prime time for us to understand God's grace to us more deeply than we ever have before.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*