

‘Chewbacca Mom’: How Feeling Safe Brings You Joy

It was a last-minute request to come and speak for a friend at her church. I would need to fly myself (and my kiddos with me) from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Sacramento, California, the following morning. I didn’t have time to prepare my thoughts for flying. Preparation had become a huge advantage in calming my nerves ... but this time I couldn’t. Nevertheless, I was with my children, and my “momma bear” instincts overtook anything else I would feel. We made it in plenty of time to the airport with moments to spare for last-minute restroom breaks and a coffee run for myself.

My son was 7 years old; my daughter was 8. It was right in the middle of their summer break, and we were all excited about the spontaneous weekend adventure awaiting us in Cali. We settled into our seats and pulled out our handheld devices to entertain and distract us. The flight took off smoothly, and we were served snacks and drinks without a hiccup in the air. But during the last 20 minutes of the flight, we began to experience mild turbulence that would quickly turn into severe turbulence. And, y’all, I don’t say that lightly. This was crazy. I had felt turbulence that was choppy, but this was more than that. We began to jolt furiously. It felt as though we were in the hands of an irresponsible, giant toddler in the sky playing with a toy airplane being swooshed and whooshed from side to side.

I was not the only one who became genuinely concerned for our safety. A woman behind me began to yell in fear with grunts of “ooooh” and “please, God, no” mixed in. At times, the crowd let out a unified gasp of fear. Except this was no thrill ride at an amusement park; our lives depended on a metal tube in the air fighting desperately to defy gravity. Everyone knew it. Well, everyone except my 7-year-old son.

Duncan also began to make a ruckus as we flip-flopped in the air. But it was a ruckus of pure joy! I looked over to see him with his hands raised high in the air, laughing and screaming in exhilaration. My initial thought was *What is wrong with him? Doesn't he know we are all going to die?* Then, after what seemed like an eternity, the plane leveled out, and we all recovered our throats from the pit of our stomachs.

But not my Duncan. Nope. He was yelling to me (as though I weren't sitting directly next to him), "Mom! That was awesome! Can we do it again? Please?" I looked at his innocent face and the naivety hidden behind his sweet question, and learned something about simple joys in that moment.

Duncan didn't just see the danger as an adventure (and that alone is a lesson worth more than gold). No, my son taught me that joy was more accessible when we feel safe.

Being safe and feeling safe are often not synonymous.

Yet ... all Duncan knew was that his momma was with him and would keep him safe no matter what. I find this beautiful truth also has a place in my faith. As a person who not only claims to believe in God but places her trust in God, I have experienced joy so many times solely because I believe I am safe in His hands.

I don't know what your gauge for safety and security is. But I do know that when you feel safe, you allow space for joy. You find adventure no matter the outside danger. You can laugh and let go with hands raised high when life gets turbulent instead of clutching the armrests of insecurities and fear. And that is a simple joy I long to know each and every day—especially when I am in the thick of fear. {eo}

Candace Payne is an author, speaker and viral sensation. Her 2016 Facebook Live video, which shows her trying on a Chewbacca mask, holds the record for the most-viewed Facebook Live video in history (170+ million views) and resulted in her

becoming internationally known as “Chewbacca Mom.” She has been featured in more than 3,000 media outlets including Good Morning America, The Late Late Show With James Corden, The New York Times, People and Cosmopolitan. She is the author of Laugh It Up, Defiant Joy and Simple Joys. Candace lives in Texas with her husband, two children and ornery pugs.

This article is an excerpt from Payne’s newest book, Simple Joys (Zondervan, Sept. 25, 2018).