



MOM

KEEP
CALM

AND

CONNECT
WITH GOD

BOOKLET 2

Contents

God of Hope, Trust and Peace (part 1)	1
God of Hope, Trust and Peace (part 2)	3
God of Hope, Trust and Peace (part 3)	5
God of Hope, Trust and Peace (part 4)	8
Letting Go and Trusting in God (part 1)	11
Letting Go and Trusting in God (part 2)	14
Letting Go and Trusting in God (part 3)	16
Sharing and Teaching our Children about God	19
The Heart and Role of Motherhood	20
Fearfully and Wonderfully Made	22
Godly Plans	23
God Loves You	24
The Joy of Surrender	26
Remember your Husband	27
God Loves Families	29
Do Not Worry	30
Mercy	31
Change and Become Like a Little Child	33
What I Would Do Different	35
Quiet Time for All Occasions	37
Making Parenting Fun	39
The 'Dark Clouds' Don't Last Forever	40
Houston, We Have a Problem!	42
Unity in Times of Adversity	44

God of Hope, Trust and Peace (PART 1)

Becoming a mom for the first time is one of the most exciting, exhilarating and terrifying experiences. It is a time of great and conflicting emotions, joy and fear wrapped up all at the same time. I remember even while I was pregnant, feeling such excitement and yet such anxiety. "What kind of mom was I going to be?", "Am I ready?" Let me tell you, you will never be ready to be a mom until you become one! Just like you will never be ready to turn 50 until you do!

The exciting truth is that whatever we are not ready for, God is ready for us. He is more than willing to make up for where we are lacking. That is why we are so privileged to be able to put our hope in Him. Having your baby is a beautiful time where despite all the conflicting hormones and emotions, you can find your heavenly Father in new and exciting ways.

Romans 15:13

*I pray that God, the source of **hope**, will fill you completely with joy and **peace** because you **trust** in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

One verse, but so much in it! Hope, trust and peace. Take some time to meditate on this incredible promise. What does God want to be for you?

A GOD OF HOPE

Romans 4:17-24

That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who brings into existence what didn't exist before. When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed him. God had also said, "Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars," even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact,

with God

young mom | 1

*his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. **He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised.** And because of Abraham's faith, God declared him to be righteous. Now this wonderful truth - that God declared him to be righteous - wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. **It was for us; too,** assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead.*

I have emphasized what you can pray about and think about from these few verses. How **convinced** are you that **God's promises are for you**? I remember feeling so fearful about bringing children into this crazy, ugly world we live in. These are some of the promises I held onto as I navigated the journey of becoming a Mom:

Matt 6:33, Romans 8:28, Deuteronomy 31:8, Jeremiah 29: 11-14, Psalm 23:4, Philippians 4:4-8.

Write down some promises that you are going to memorise and hold on to: God is and must be our hope.

Lisa Comrie

God of Hope, Trust and Peace (PART 2)

MORE ON 'A GOD OF HOPE':

I prepared in all the right ways according to antenatal classes for the birth of our eldest daughter Linzi. However, when the time arrived, nothing went according to the classes! I didn't go into labour as planned, I had to be induced. The contractions were not going by the book at all; I couldn't get my breath, in fact all the theory about breathing went out the window. Then when I believed, after all that pain, I must be 10cm dilated, I was only 2cm ... bring on the epidural, no all natural for me, thank you! And then my baby went into distress and the race was on, no natural birth either but an emergency caesarean to get her out in the quickest possible time. What helped me at the time, with all the panic and pandemonium of the doctor and nurses, was putting my hope in God's promises and that this was his baby. All I could do was pray for her to be healthy and I had to surrender to the circumstances of her birth.

Make a note of these promises because you will come back to them as your child grows up and as you add to your family. You will need His promises at every stage your children enter into and emerge from. I am now a nearly empty nester. (One out the nest and one still in!) I am still holding onto these promises that I have prayed through, from the time I was pregnant.

Psalm 33:16-22

The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior. Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory - for all its strength, it cannot save you. But the LORD watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine. We depend on the LORD alone to save us. Only he can help us, protecting us like a shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we are trusting in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone.

Choose to hope deeply; no matter what your circumstances. What do you find challenging about putting your hope on God? (*I find it challenging to have to wait! We don't always get the answers very quickly!*)

with God

young mom | 3

Doesn't waiting teach us so much? What are you waiting for? What has waiting taught you, or what is it teaching you? Patience, surrender, endurance?

Mark 10:46-52

*And so they reached Jericho. Later, as Jesus and his disciples left town, a great crowd was following. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road as Jesus was going by. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus from Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Be quiet!" some of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come here." So they called the blind man. "Cheer up," they said. "Come on, he's calling you!" Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. **"What do you want me to do for you?"** Jesus asked. "Teacher," the blind man said, "I want to see!" And Jesus said to him, "Go your way. Your faith has healed you." And instantly the blind man could see! Then he followed Jesus down the road.*

Think about the above ... spend a few minutes thinking about what you want Jesus to do for you and what you want Jesus to do for your child? Connect with Jesus in what you long for.

Read: **Psalm 40**

Lisa Comrie

God of Hope, Trust and Peace (PART 3)

A GOD WHO IS WORTHY OF TRUST:

Psalm 40:4

Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord ...

Psalm 18:1-2

I love you, LORD; you are my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.

HOW DO WE MAKE HIM OUR ROCK?

Psalm 18:3 *I will call on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, for he saves me from my enemies.*

Psalm 18:6 *But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes, I prayed to my God for help.*

How many times over the years have I had to call on God in my distress over my children? Health issues and hospital visits, character issues, problems at school: academic and social, emotional challenges ... the list is endless. When our children hurt, we hurt! My youngest daughter ended up in hospital late on a Sunday night after an emergency call to our GP, just after her first birthday. She had a severe tummy bug and I had watched her becoming more listless and "lifeless" all weekend. The initial treatment helped the dehydration but they didn't know what bug was causing the infection. It meant a longer stay in hospital waiting for cultures so we could get the right treatment. The hospital had no facility for moms to stay over so I would leave at 10pm and arrive back at 5am. The stress of that separation for my 1 year old caused her to stop walking (she had just started taking her first steps) ... she wouldn't even try, not until a whole month later! To say I was distressed, is putting it mildly! In my distress I had to cry out to God and I had to trust that he would heal her physically and emotionally.

GOD ANSWERS:

Psalm 18:16-19 *He **reached down** from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of*

with God

young mom | 5

deep waters. He **rescued me from my powerful enemies**, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. They attacked me at a moment when I was weakest, but the LORD supported me. He led me to a place of safety; he rescued me because he delights in me.

He rescued her and He rescued me because God delights in us and sees our distress. God allows our faith to be tested so that we will see him. Think of different situations where God has tested your faith with your baby.

Do you believe that God delights in you? Often we don't! I have to pray all the time to have a faithful attitude to challenges. I have to pray to consider them a joy and good for me! When we are challenged, we withdraw from God instead of praying, and then we wonder why we don't see God?

THINK OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN: WHY WAS THE TREE THERE

God put the tree in the garden to allow Adam and Eve the freedom to choose, which would make the relationship genuine and meaningful. By giving humans the freedom to choose, the Creator chose to limit his own power. We limit the power of God in our lives when we try to take control or make decisions that move us away from God.

When we are trusting God, we experience more of his power. When we choose to trust our own wisdom, it usually leads us to disobey. Disobedience flows out of mistrust in God's nature. Adam and Eve had to learn to trust God only after trusting themselves and finding out how misguided they were to try and do that! Satan tempted them into not trusting God.

In what ways does Satan get you to mistrust God?

LOOK AT WHAT TRUST DOES:

Psalm 18:29-37 *In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall. As for God, his way is perfect. **All the LORD's promises prove true.** He is a shield for all who look to him for protection. For who is God except the LORD? Who but our God is a solid rock? **God arms me with strength;** he has made my way safe. He makes me as surefooted as a deer, leading me safely along the*

mountain heights. He prepares me for battle; he strengthens me to draw a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of your salvation. Your right hand supports me; your gentleness has made me great. You have made a wide path for my feet to keep them from slipping. I chased my enemies and caught them; I did not stop until they were conquered.

Matthew 23:37 ... *how often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.*

A forest fire burnt down a farmhouse in western Canada. As the embers cooled, the devastated farmer was walking over the ruins and noticed a burned lump on the ground. He prodded it with his stick and saw that it was a hen, burned to death. The farmer turned the hen over and, to his surprise, out ran three chirping baby chicks. The hen had died in the flames even as it saved the lives of her helpless brood. Not all chicks run to their mother in times of danger ... some get paralysed in their panic or they try to find a way to save themselves. The chicks have to go to the mother, she cannot run around individually and gather them, and they must go to her. They don't have to earn it; they just have to run to her to cover them. All that matters is the chick's willingness to listen to the call of the mother. Jesus compared himself to a hen eager for the safety of her brood. Do you run to Jesus or do you find yourself paralysed, in a panic or trying to take control?

Is Satan whispering?

"If God is not going to give you what you think you need, maybe you should go get it yourself ..."

"God helps those who help themselves"

WHEN YOU KNOW HOW MUCH YOU ARE LOVED BY GOD, YOU WILL TRUST HIM

1 John 4:10 *This is real love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.*

Lisa Comrie

with God

young mom | 7

God of Hope, Trust and Peace (PART 4)

A GOD OF PEACE

Psalm 18:30-33 *God's way is **perfect**. All the LORD's promises prove true. He is a **shield** for all who look to him for **protection**. For who is God except the LORD? Who but our God is a solid rock? God arms me with **strength**, and he makes my way perfect. He makes me as surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights.*

Peace is God's intention. No matter our circumstances, we can be at peace and trust God and his timing. But ... it takes work! Faith!

The above verse makes reference to a deer being sure-footed. Look at the pictures below. In the Middle-East, the reference refers to the deer on the right! Not the stable, wonderful surroundings that we see on the left.



Phil. 4:6-8 *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters,*

one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Your thoughts control your feelings. What you think about, makes you more anxious or more peaceful! What anxious thoughts do you struggle with?

My girls have grown up now and at various times they will say to me “Don’t worry, Mom!” Telling me not to worry is like telling me not to breathe. I will always “worry” about my girls, no matter how old they are. You will always worry about your children ... it is what we do with that worry that counts. Are you going to train yourself to be godly in this area?

Phillipians 4:6-7 (The Message)

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the centre of your life.

The NIV says it “Transcends human understanding”.

We have to control our thoughts. God’s promises can change the way we think, when we take our anxieties to him in prayer and focus on faithful thoughts, what is true, what is amazing, etc.

PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF TROUBLE. IT IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Reflect:

What troubles your heart?

What is stealing the peace from your heart?

What brings chaos into your heart?

God’s purpose is to help us to find peace in the midst of these struggles.

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

with God

young mom | 9

There is no law against these things!

The virtues of the Holy Spirit are supernatural. When we have peace despite our circumstances, it is supernatural. It should feel miraculous! To have these fruits in certain circumstances is nothing short of miraculous. Biblical peace is beyond human understanding. It is the paranormal! It is not about burying our heads in the sand like an ostrich, but lifting our heads and faces to Jesus and trusting his guidance and timing in our lives.

Deuteronomy 30:11-20 *This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, and it is not beyond your reach. It is not kept in heaven, so distant that you must ask, 'Who will go up to heaven and bring it down so we can hear it and obey?' It is not kept beyond the sea, so far away that you must ask, 'Who will cross the sea to bring it to us so we can hear it and obey?' No, the message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart so that you can obey it. Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy. But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

Choose life; choose to live in God's power. Remember, free will, God chose to limit his power so that we can choose to have his power explode in and through us!

The power of hope, of trust and of peace.

Lisa Comrie

Letting Go and Trusting in God (PART 1)

It was right after I'd come home from the hospital with my first child, Carter, when it really hit me: that amazing, miraculous love called a mother's love. I didn't feel joyful, though. I was terrified. First of all, I feared that I loved this precious baby more than God. And then, as if that wasn't awful enough, I was simultaneously filled with an almost unbearable fear of losing him. How could I live if such a nightmare happened? I couldn't bear it.

As I sat there all alone in my apartment in New York City, except for this precious baby boy cradled in my arms, I prayed: "Lord, please don't let me love this child more than I love You, and please help me to trust You with his life." With that prayer, I remember taking Carter and literally raising him up above my lap and deliberately dedicating him to God. I begged God to help me not to love my child above Him, and to trust Him with his life.

Since that day in 1991, we went on to have two beautiful daughters, and had the blessing of adopting an amazing son from China. I wish I could say that I've never struggled with trusting God with the care and keeping of these "children" of His (they're actually 25, 23, 20, and 13 at this moment!), but I have. Thankfully though, my faith has been strengthened greatly over the years as I've seen our good Father prove His faithfulness to me again and again. Here are some of the scriptures that have helped me the most through the years:

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down and when you get up.

Bill and I tried our best when the kids were little to have perfect family devotionals. I still laugh at our earnest efforts to corral our little ones into a nice, quiet circle in order to teach them the Word of God, but most of the time, things didn't go as

we'd planned! There were too many times when Carter would start poking one of his sisters, one of the girls would start clowning around to be funny, or the other would be totally annoyed at both of them! Things would unravel into someone crying, and we grown-ups would be frustrated and irritable! Maybe some of you can relate!?

Take heart though, because when you read Deuteronomy 6, you can see that God understands how chaotic families with young children can be. The way I see this is that He tells us to "sow (seeds of faith) as we go." God wants us to make the scriptures part of our daily lives. We need to make them practical and talk about the scriptures all the time. Talk about them on the way to church and pray together about being giving in the fellowship. Talk about them at night when they are scared. I still remember my mother telling me that ... *the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* (1 John 4:4)

We read to our kids almost every night before bed from their children's Bibles. We'd talk about God's Word often as we sat at the dinner table (still do!). As the children got older, Bill would have little 'quiet times' with them before school. He would also schedule special "dates", sometimes at a favourite restaurant with the kids individually and talk about spiritual things with them. Now, Zi is the only one left at home. Bill has short devotionals with him most mornings before he heads off to school.

God's Word is ... *useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16). Use it! Make it practical with your kids in their day-to-day situations. Finally, I think the absolute MOST important thing our children need to see is US having our own Bible studies. Our children have told us that seeing Bill and I studying our Bibles each morning is the one thing that has made the biggest impact on their lives. Yes, please keep trying to have those wonderful "official" family devotionals, but make the Scriptures and prayer a part of your everyday family life. You are planting seeds of faith in your children's hearts.

Getting Practical:

1. What do you think your children see in you and your household? Do they see you walking with God? Ask them! (And get ready to be humble!) Do they see someone

who compartmentalizes their religion to only Sunday mornings, or do they see you walking by faith each day as you try make God's Word part of your everyday life?

2. How can you use God's Word in a more practical way each day with your children?

Amanda Burke

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young mom | 13

Letting Go and Trusting in God (PART 2)

Exodus 1:15-2:10 (Moses's Early Years)

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." (Exodus 1:22)

As I stated earlier, one of my greatest fears, when I first had a child was my absolute terror of losing him. Unfortunately, I still struggle with worry about my kids at times. However, I recently read an article based on these two chapters of Exodus that has really been a great comfort to me.

Imagine you are Moses's mother, and you hear the king of Egypt has issued a decree that every Hebrew baby boy is to be killed. I can imagine her as she gazed at her precious child that she felt the same overwhelming love and fear that I remember feeling. Instead of panicking though, she made a plan. She did her part by preparing a papyrus basket and waterproofing it as best as she could, but then she entrusted him to God by placing him in it among the reeds along the bank of the mighty Nile River. Wow! What incredible faith! Can you imagine doing such a thing? The Nile River is teeming with crocodiles! I'd be overwhelmed by anxiety and fear! But we read nothing of that. She placed her baby boy in that basket and entrusted him into the hands of God. And look what God did: not only did He take care of baby Moses by sending him into the loving arms of Pharaoh's daughter, but He gave him back to his mom to nurse him! She even got PAID by Pharaoh's daughter to do this!

We have got to trust God enough to let our children go - to put them into whatever our Nile River may be – and trust that God will take better care of them than we could ever imagine! Do you fear leaving them with a sitter so that you and your husband can have some rare alone-time? Are you fearful to let them begin pre-school?

Whatever it is, we so easily forget that they are God's children to begin with. We just get the privilege of taking care of them for a little while for Him. Remember, Jesus said, ... *their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in*

heaven. (Matt. 18:11) What a wonderful comfort this is!

Some questions to ponder:

1. Have you truly entrusted your children to God? In what areas do you need to surrender in?
2. What is your "Nile River"? In what areas do you find it to be the hardest to trust God in, with your children?

Amanda Burke

with God

Letting Go and Trusting in God (PART 3)

Luke 15:11-32 (The Parable of the Prodigal Son)

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

I wish I could say that as we've raised these four amazing children, things have always gone exactly as we've wished. At first though, it seemed that way. Thankfully, none of our children ever went through the "terrible teens." They've all been, by the grace of God, what people would consider "good kids." Our oldest daughter was baptised into Christ first, when she was 16. She was faithful all through college, and has just married a wonderful Christian man this past January.

Carter took a bit more time, which is just fine! (Please don't pressure your kids to become Christians! They'll be ready in God's own time!) He didn't make the decision to follow Jesus until he was 19, as a freshman in college (varsity). He has also, just married a lovely Christian woman this past May. (Try to encourage your kids not to all get married in the same year as our oldest two have done this year! It's been wonderful, but a bit overwhelming!) And then there is our precious third child. She's our charmer, our comedian, our very talented theater kid. She was also baptised into Christ as a teen, at 15, and did well until her senior year of high school. Then, things did not go as we'd planned.

At that time, the pull of the world became too enticing for her, and she decided that she did not want to be a disciple any more. She wanted to "figure things out for herself." Our hearts were, and still are, broken. However, and as difficult as it has been, we have also learned so much through this time. In Luke 15:11-32, the story of the prodigal son has been a source of constant comfort to me. I have decided to follow the example of the father in the story. He gave his younger son his share of his inheritance, and let him go. He did not chase after him. He did not try to control him. He did not preach at him and warn him. He just let him go. This father had to trust, as Moses's mother did, that God truly had his beloved, yet rebellious son, in His care.

It's interesting that you don't see the father worrying about his son. He was just

waiting. I imagine he must have gone out every day to see if he was coming. I know this because it says that he saw him "while he was still a long way off." I don't know how long the son was gone, but it must have been for a long time. The most obvious thing, though, is that he never stopped loving his son during this time. When his son did return, the father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. There was no rebuke, no reminder of the wrongs he'd done or sins he'd committed. There was just unconditional love and rejoicing that he'd finally come home.

I also see that the son had to learn things for himself. He had to live the life he thought would bring him happiness and learn that those things only bring heartbreak. He had to learn how good he had it when he was living with his father. Unfortunately, he didn't realize it until he ended up starving in a pigpen. He had to get grateful. He had to see that he couldn't make it without being with his father. But his dad couldn't teach him these things. His son had to figure it out on his own. I believe this passage is in the Bible to teach us that we must let God do His work on our children's hearts. We've got to step away, stop trying to rescue them, and let them learn from their mistakes.

This time of waiting on the Lord has been so difficult, but we've learned so much about trusting God with our daughter that we would have never learned another way. We have learned to love her unconditionally. We have learned to accept her for who she is, not for who we wish she would be. And we sincerely do. Acceptance does not mean approving all she does, and she knows clearly what we believe about things. But she also knows that our LOVE for her is not contingent upon how she lives her life.

The wonderful thing is that she and I are so incredibly close, still. I'm the first one she calls when she is feeling stressed or discouraged. She still wants me to pray with her when her heart has been broken, or pray for her when she has a big exam. I share scriptures with her that will remind her of God's goodness. Her daddy and I have had many serious talks with her, but we have tried not to preach. We want her to feel that no matter what, she can come to us. We strive to keep our lines of communication open. She has told us things that have been very hard to hear, yet we have always tried to show her the unconditional - yet honest - love that Jesus would show her. When she is ready to return to Jesus, and I have absolutely NO

doubt that one day she will, she will know that we are waiting for her, to welcome her back home with open arms. We cannot wait.

Getting practical:

1. Do your children feel unconditional love from you, or do they feel like your acceptance of them depends on if they do what YOU feel they should do?
2. If you have older children who have not become disciples yet, are you letting them come to faith in their own time, or do they feel pressure from you? Even if you may not be putting this pressure on them, they still may feel it. Have a talk with them to reassure them that you love them no matter what and want to give them the freedom to come to their own convictions when they are ready.
3. Do you let your children feel the natural consequences of their mistakes, or do you always rush to "bail them out"?

Amanda Burke

Sharing and Teaching our Children about God

Read Psalm 78:1-8

Verse 1-3

Describe the psalmist's attitude and desire about sharing and teaching. Does this describe you? Why or why not?

Verse 4-6

Make a list of God's praiseworthy deeds and wonders and how you see his power displayed. What are some statutes, laws and commandments of God that you follow? List them.

Verse 7-8

Why does God want us to share and teach these things to our children? How often do you share or teach the things you wrote down, with your children?

Practical:

Think of three practical ways to start sharing and teaching about God so that your children learn to trust Him and develop loyal hearts towards Him.

Keri Aguirre

with God

The Heart and Role of Motherhood

Read the following Proverbs and list the qualities or actions that God intends for mothers.

Proverbs 1:8 *Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

Proverbs 3:33 *The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.*

Proverbs 6:20-23 *My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life.*

Proverbs 9:13 *Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing.*

Proverbs 14:1 *The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.*

Proverbs 14:26 *Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.*

Proverbs 19:18 *Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.*

Proverbs 22:6 *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

Proverbs 22:15 *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.*

Proverbs 23:13-14 *Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death.*

Proverbs 23:15-16 *My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad indeed; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.*

Proverbs 23:22-25 *Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy the truth and do not sell it – wisdom, instruction and insight as well. The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him. May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful!*

Proverbs 24:3-4 *By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.*

Proverbs 27:23-24 *Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.*

Proverbs 29:15, 17 *A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.*

Proverbs 31:15, 21, 26, 28, 30 *She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants ... When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet ... She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue ... Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her ... Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

Keri Aguirre

with God

young mom | 21

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Psalm 139:13-16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

This is the perfect psalm to read when you just had a baby. Look at how perfectly your baby has been made. Look at the detail on its hands, the eyes, and the mouth. God made your baby perfectly. He knit your baby together in your womb.

In Bill Bryson's book "A Short History of Nearly Everything," he writes: "It starts with a single cell. The first cell splits to become two and the two become four and so on. After just 47 doublings, you have 10 000 trillion cells in your body and are ready to spring forth as a human being. And every one of those cells knows exactly what to do, to preserve and nurture you from the moment of conception to your last breath. Every cell in nature is a thing of wonder. Even the simplest are far beyond the limits of human ingenuity. To build the most basic yeast cell for example, you would have to miniaturize about the same number of components as are found in a Boeing 777 jetliner and fit them into a sphere just 5 microns across; then somehow you would have to persuade that sphere to reproduce."

I often pray to God to open my spiritual eyes. It is easy to forget about the wonder of creation when there are sleepless nights, dirty nappies and feeding problems.

Ephesians 1:18-19a

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Eike Diedericks

Godly Plans

Jeremiah 29:11-13

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

This verse was written while God's people were in captivity and had to wait 70 years before coming home. They were exiles from Jerusalem, taken to Babylon. It was part of God's plan. At times motherhood can feel like slavery, because you don't feel free to do what you want with your time.

Being overwhelmed and overtired with four kids under the age of four and feeling I had no time for anything else, I remember praying about God's plan for my life. I prayed that I would trust that He will give me hope and a future. I also prayed that I would seek God and His will with all my heart, even if caring for the kids seemed to consume my whole life.

Eike Diederichs

God loves You

1 John 4: 10, 19

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins ... We love because he first loved us.

God loved us first. We are able to love others because of his love for us. His love can motivate us to live a life of love.

As mothers, insecurities can steal our joy, prevent us from being in the moment with our baby, make us feel guilty on the one hand or feeling unsupported and resentful on the other.

It has taken me years to accept God's love for me and it is still my quest to grow in my understanding of his love and experiencing the security and confidence it offers. Not to see love from a worldly point of view, as it is portrayed in so many songs. I recently studied all the scriptures about love in the Bible, resulting in a deep confidence that God truly loves me and cares about me despite all my weaknesses and insecurities.

Ephesians 1:4-8

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

God chose you to be his daughter before the creation of the world and he is the one who chose you to be your baby's mom.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps

no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

If God is love, this is what God's love for you is like. Allow him to love you in this way.

Eike Diederichs

with God

young mom | 25

The Joy of Surrender

Psalm 16

*Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.
I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."
I say of the holy people who are in the land,
"They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."
Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.
Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

This is one of my favourite psalms. I have often meditated on its content during times of feeling overwhelmed. It reminds me that if I surrender to God and don't fight my current situation, I can experience His joy. Joy comes from experiencing God's presence and having hope for the future because of Him.

Nehemiah 8: 10c

... for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Eike Diederichs

Remember your Husband

In the changed household of raising a baby, where sleep and time for self-care is limited, our priorities can easily get mixed up. The physical and emotional demands often dictate our priority list. The relationship with your husband can be relegated to a 'nice to have' position. He can feel left out because baby consumes your being.

Physiologically speaking, the hormone that causes bonding during physical intimacy, Oxytocin, also gets released when mom handles and breastfeeds baby. The mom's bonding needs can thus be fulfilled by baby alone.

Biblical priorities:

Matthew 22:36-40

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Ephesians 5:21-33

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy (set apart) ... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself ... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Malachi 2:15

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

Discernment in determining priorities in your relationships is really important. Often men dissociate when coming into contact with a newborn or small baby.

with God

Drawing him into this close relationship is essential. We would all love to raise godly offspring.

Practicals that helped us:

- Working and playing together (our baby vs my baby)
- Communication and spending time together (weekly marriage nights as early as practical – asking for babysitting help)
- Basic tasks dad did for baby made me feel supported and thankful
- Actively training my mind to focus on dad and his needs and not talking or thinking about baby and its needs 24/7 (putting us in a bubble in my mind)
- *Unity in devotion to God and each other. Ephesians 5:21-33*
- Understanding that there will be continual changes, challenges and readjustments needed and that we are not perfect (it's a dynamic process)
- Eating and going to sleep together, and sleep training (for us: not having kids in the bedroom)
- Asking ourselves, "what would God want us to do now/with our time?"

Phillipians 1:9-10

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

Pieter and Eike Diederichs

God loves Families

Psalm 68:6a

God sets the lonely in families

Zechariah 8:4-5

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

I love this verse of God painting a picture of an extended family/community, to motivate the Israelites to go back to Jerusalem. There are many scriptures in the bible that confirm that God loves families – he wants everyone to feel part of a family. What children learn about family life in their physical family, prepares them for being part of the greater spiritual family.

I had to remind myself of this often, when raising children seemed to take up most of my time and I felt guilty that I was not doing enough for God. I often felt that whenever I was busy with something, something else was neglected. I had to remind myself to enjoy my children and enjoy the gift of being a mother.

Psalm 78:5-7

*He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.*

Even if we do not follow the law today, this Psalm shows how God's plan is for one generation to teach the next about trusting God by being obedient.

Eike Diederichs

Do Not Worry

Sitting outside one morning, I was trying to connect with God. I remember thinking I am such a bad mother and wife.

Oh, just doom and gloom. One negative thought after another.

I opened my bible, wanting to find verses to disciple myself or verses on repentance ...

But then I read **Psalm 46:10**

Be still and know that I am God.

I read it again and again!

(God must have thought at last, she understands.)

So I stopped my senseless babbling, closed my eyes and just let go ... and let God come through.

This for me was one of the most precious times I've had with our God and Father. Instead of being disciplined, God blessed me with his love and kindness. The verses that came through were so from God!

"I have loved you with an everlasting love ..."

"You are my treasured possession ..."

"Stop and consider God's wonders ..."

God sings to me! (**Zephaniah 3:17**)

I would love to encourage you, when you feel you can't pray or focus with reading ... be still and know that I AM GOD!

Stop and listen to God's words of love.

Marion Cleaver

Mercy

Titus 3:4-5

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

We can go through many emotions in one day. One day we are up and one day we are down. Our hormones can sometimes be out of wack. We can cope with our children one minute and the next minute, we can't.

It is so easy for me not to feel good enough, as a disciple, a wife and a mother.

If I focus on myself and see myself through a judgmental lens, I can quickly go on a downward spiral that leads to frustration, fear, anxiety and fretting. I have been at the bottom of that downward spiral often and it is terrifying. You lose yourself and it is full of Satan's lies!

The good news is there is an upward spiral! You might need some friends to pull you out.

Psalm 37:8

... Do not fret it leads only to evil.

I love The Message version:

Quiet down before God, be prayerful before him ... Bridle your anger, trash your wrath, cool your pipes - it only makes things worse.

Hebrews 12:2

Fix your eyes on Jesus.

MSG: Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed ...

Holding on to scripture will start us on the upward spiral.

with God

Focus ...

It's not about my ups and downs, but about God.

It's not how we perform or the amount of things we can get done.

It is all about GOD, how strong HE is and the mercy he has for us. AND HE IS MERCIFUL!

Remember who God is. He is the same every day, even when we are not.

He is LOVE and He is KINDNESS.

Leesa van Niekerk

Change and Become Like a Little Child

Mathew 18:3

And he said: I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Children are so humble, gentle, innocent, loving, pure, fun, vulnerable and open.

Parenting is an endless pursuit of humility.

My children have taught me what humility looks like in so many ways.

I remember looking at some small kids in church when I was single, and thinking I will never let my child do that! Ha-ha, mine did whatever it was and WORSE!

Servanthood ... from changing dirty nappies to cleaning multicoloured vomit and lumo green snot.

Dependence on God ... through their hospital emergencies, stitches, asthma attacks. Health issues I know nothing about. The complete scary unknown.

Sacrifice ... staying up for nights with tummy bugs or temperatures. Redoing grade R, grade 4 and grade 6 exams! Being controlled when they don't like my food? Or when you sacrifice your last apple, biscuit, sip of water of chocolate ...

Asking advice ... from people that have gone before us. Hearing how I need to repent of my bad habits/sin to be a better example.

Hurting for them ... when they have been bullied or embarrassed, afraid or didn't make the team.

Children are lovely and they need to be loved and respected.

They are so innocent and easy to teach, open to apologies and easy to forgive.

Their hearts are soft.

It is wonderful to connect with your child at every level they go through. They need it and so do you. It will build on your relationship with them from a young age.

Play with them, laugh with them, sing, cry, pray and be silly with them. Talk to them about their world and enjoy every minute.

Daniel, now 10, still remembers when I fed him like a speed train or slow boat!

Books that helped me:

Raising Awesome Kids.

Boundaries with Kids.

The Quiver.

Shepherding a Child's Heart.

How To Speak So Your Kids Will Listen And How To Listen So Your Kids Will Speak.

Leesa van Niekerk

What I would Do Different

I had two very different babies. The one slept six hours day and night and screamed blue murder the rest of the time. This lasted until about six months.

The oldest slept 20 hours, night and day, and I can't even remember her ever crying.

My kids are now 13 and 16 years old. Both are in high school next year. Elena will finish school in two years.

So, 16 years on, what would I say to Irene as she sits with her newly born, screaming baby, healing from an episiotomy tear that felt like I had barbed wire between my legs? Two things:

1. So much of life with a newborn is disputable

Romans 14 is a passage on disputable matters.

In context, Romans 14 deals with eating food sacrificed to idols, not something we worry about today, but what it gives us is a basis to deal with all disputable matters in life.

A disputable matter is one where there really isn't a right or wrong answer, but rather it's a matter of opinion and figuring out what is best in a specific situation. Sin is not a disputable matter, neither is how a person is saved, but whether you should sleep train a baby at 12 weeks or 24 weeks certainly is!

- There are so many people out there with so many very strong opinions that will tell you what is right and wrong. They can make you feel like a terrible mom if you listen to all the competing voices.
- What I would do differently, is find one source that I can trust (a person and maybe a book) and ignore everything else.
- I listened to too many people and tried to make people happy by applying their advice. I was so worried about being a perfect mom and doing everything right, that I ended up being a miserable people-pleaser!
- In verse five, the scripture says, "you must be fully convinced in your own mind."

- People mean well with all the advice they give, but at the end of the day, you are the one sitting with a colicky baby, sleepless nights and mastitis.
- Find that one person, doctor or nurse and go with what they say.

2. Be honest about what you are feeling

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Looking back, I realise how proud I was when I had my first baby. I really struggled, with depression, insecurity and feelings of not coping, but instead of being open I tried to act like everything was ok.

I think if I had to do it over again, I would be gut-level honest about how hard it was, even if it shocked others (including my husband). I would have gotten more help from spiritual trusted advisors about how to cope. I may have even gone to see a psychologist and if recommended, gone on medication.

I just felt so ashamed that I wasn't the perfect mom I wanted to be, with the perfect baby! I constantly compared myself and my baby to others and felt like such a failure!

Be honest and cry for help if you need it!

It will be over before you know it.

Treasure the time, be vulnerable, its going to be ok!

Irene Renton

Quiet Time for All Occasions

Matt 6:9-16

This is a meditation suitable for all occasions, but especially when the day is hectic and you need to connect with the amazing reality of being a disciple of Jesus. It can take 10 minutes or an hour!

We all know the Lord's Prayer, but only recently have I become aware of the treasure we have! Jesus gives us the words and attitudes we should have when we talk to our awesome Creator. Have we made the mistake of bypassing it as though it is out of date or not intense enough? This is how Jesus prayed!

You know this prayer, so you can be anywhere when you meditate on the words: with a Bible or without, with pen and paper or without, with children around or without! And there is always more you can add to this study when you have time. Here goes!

OUR – We are never alone as we are always part of the family of God. Jesus is there with us.

FATHER – What a privilege to call God 'father'! He wants us to relate to Him as beloved children of the perfect DAD (Abba). Enjoy basking in his unconditional love!

IN HEAVEN – But we must never forget to give Him honour and worship for He is a mighty, awesome Spirit filling everything and far beyond our understanding.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME – Lets re-commit to teach each other and our children to love and respect Him, in our words and actions.

YOUR KINGDOM COME – Be reminded of the temporary nature of your life on earth and the eternity that we look forward to. Don't be consumed by daily concerns and forget our reality.

YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN – Take stock of your day

with God

so far and see if you are pleasing him. Being a great mother is pleasing to him!
Encouraging others, sharing your faith etc.

GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD – Jesus understood the anxiety of having to provide for our families each day and he wants us to put these requests to God. God cares about you.

AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS – We are forgiven already because of Jesus, but checking our lives for sin and repenting should still be a daily practice. Give thanks for his grace!

AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS – Jesus knew we would struggle with sin in our relationships. Think about yours and where you need to forgive or be forgiven.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION – We need the Holy Spirit to help us avoid those sins that come so easily to us. Forewarned is fore-armed! Ask him to make you aware of the traps of Satan!

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL – We live amongst evil and unreasonable people. Fear can really paralyze us and make us unloving and withdrawn. Put your safety in God's hands.

Here are some scriptures to add to this study. See how many more you can find.
1 John 3:1-3; Isaiah 57:15; Phillipians 2:10; John 14:2; John; John 14:15; Matthew 6:26;
Colossians 1:10; Colossians 3:13; Psalm 119:105

Mike & Daphne Renton

Making Parenting Fun

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I can't believe that my youngest son is 10 years old already. Reminiscing on his years as an infant brings back some "great" and "not so great" memories. Even though it seems like a lifetime ago, I remember this phase not always being easy. The two things that helped me, the most through those early years as a father, were:

1. God's peace

A scripture that really helped tremendously was Philippians 4:6-7.

I remember sitting up many nights, bottle-feeding and feeling extremely frustrated and tired. I would share my frustrations with God, as I watched my wife getting her much-needed sleep. I would often bottle-feed, pray and sleep at the same time.

2. Making parenting fun!

Parenting has more mundane responsibilities than "fun activities". As a father, I saw it as my sole responsibility to make life "fun" for my children. Of course, this was not always possible (or realistic) but whenever I could make the humdrum task of changing the nappy, bathing or feeding fun, I would. This proved to be good for building the relationship with my son and made parenting a bit easier.

I really hope this helps.

Allistair Cloete

The Dark Clouds Don't Last Forever

Deuteronomy 33:26

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty.

I remember the elation of my wife falling pregnant, and the subsequent months that followed ... the anticipation and excitement was palpable every day!

Nothing however could have prepared me for the weeks that followed the birth of our first child. It was as if my life had been completely turned upside down. The constant attention that our newborn required was overwhelming. If I wasn't assisting with nappy changes, I was 'burping' her or feeding her or rocking her to sleep.

Gone were the days where Jax and I could go to the movies at the drop of a hat, go grab an ice cream or do something else spontaneous. After the initial excitement wore off, I began to look forward to her sleeping; even if it was only for a couple of minutes. It gave me time to rest my arms or back that were constantly fatigued. The toughest thing I found though, was the sleep deprivation. I would long for just three to four hours of straight sleep. I was irritable, easily frustrated and tired constantly.

The early upheaval that our first born brought to my life, ultimately triggered my depression. There were days where I would wake and not have the motivation to even get out of bed. I lacked purpose, energy or desire for most things. I felt like life as I knew it had taken a drastic turn for the worst and I was trapped. I even regretted having a child in the first place. People would say to me "don't worry, you're in the thick of baby fog, this won't last forever". Their 'fog' felt like a constant dark brooding cloud enveloping me daily, choking me.

It was in these darkest days that I had some of my best prayers. Desperation caused me to cry out to God and depend on Him like I had never done before. In the early hours of the morning I would cradle Gaby, rocking her to sleep. The serenity that would often come over her face would calm my soul and I would pray, silently expressing my thankfulness to God for this precious gift that he had given us. It was

in these times that I felt, if only for brief moments, absolute peace & surrender. In the stillness of those moments I would whisper to my God for comfort & solace and He never failed me. I came to truly believe that 'every dark cloud has a silver lining' and that silver lining is always God.

Paul Smith

with God

young mom | 41

Houston We Have a Problem

I could not have asked for a greater blessing than my three girls Micayla (13), Chloë (10) and Pippa (6). They are three incredibly special girls that are fearfully and wonderfully made in so many ways. I thoroughly enjoy and treasure each of them and thank God daily for them, BUT that was not always the case! Having a baby was a TOTAL SHOCK to my system and was without a doubt the HARDEST thing that I have EVER done! It felt like my life was spinning OUT OF CONTROL and there were MANY MANY MANY times (did I say MANY?) where I thought I was going to die!

But thank God for His people and His Word. There were a number of scriptures that helped me through this time. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." Every time I thought, "This is crazy!" or "This is impossible!" (our first daughter only started sleeping through the night when she was three and a half years old) I would recite the verse and remind myself, that if it was impossible, God would not have allowed it on my path. So, BRING IT ON!

The other two scriptures that were constant friends whenever I felt like, "O my goodness, am I ever going to be a proper disciple again?", were Isaiah 40:11 that says, "*... he gently leads those that have young*" and Psalm 103:13-14 that says, "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*" It just reminded me that, "the Lord understands" and that we are going to be ok.

My advice to young moms would be four things.

1. Fight for your time with God in whatever form or fashion. Sure, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to remotely have the kind of time that you had with him before, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have time with him or that you shouldn't view it as important. What we need most in the "testing seasons" of our lives is faith, and Romans 10:17 says

that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ". So fight for your faith by fighting for those times!

2. Do not forget about your man! Babies come and babies go (after 18 years), but God willing, your man will stay forever. Get back to date nights as quickly and reasonably as you can, look out for each other and fight for your marriage. It will be hard, but it will also be worth it. I think we started going on dates again (with some phone calls in-between), when Micayla was about 6 weeks old.
3. Fight to be at the meetings of the body. Many a time I would stand in the foyer of the church at a mid-week or during Sunday services trying to calm down a crying baby while asking myself, "What on earth am I doing here!" This child should be in bed, as a matter of fact, so should I!" Today I do not regret sticking it out at all. We kept the discipline, the kids adjusted and they now roll with our lives as disciples. I have seen too many parents skipping church (or other meetings of the body) to build their lives around the baby's schedule and are now still doing the same thing 10 years later. Believe me, it is not a winner.
4. Embrace and enjoy the season, with a blink of an eye it will be gone and you will never be able to hold them like you get to do right now.

My prayer for you is paraphrased from Numbers 6:24-25. "May the Lord bless you and keep you and may he make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you through this wonderful new season of your life."

All the best and enjoy the journey!

Werner Vos

with God

young mom | 43

Unity in Times of Adversity

Let's be honest ... it's a LOT easier to be emotionally close, romantic and spiritually connected to your spouse when life is easy. Even during the early phases of pregnancy, Facebook is plastered with photo-shoots of couples getting ready for baby to arrive. The excitement of waiting for the new family member is often very bonding.

When baby arrives, however, the idyllic can quickly give way to the chaotic. A couples' schedule is quickly filled with sleepless nights, nappy changes and soothing a crying baby (and that's only the easy stuff). Something as simple as finishing a cup of coffee can be an illusive privilege.

Increased pressure

When the "adversity quotient" in your life starts to increase, pressure can mount on your marriage.

Here are some things that can put pressure on your unity:

- Different ideas on what is best for the baby
- Work hours
- Time spent on chores at home
- Spending money
- Guilt (for not doing more at home or for the baby)

Then on top of these, there are things that tend to put fuel on the fire and the following tensions may arise:

- Fatigue
- Work pressure
- Lack of unwinding time
- In-laws
- Less time to talk and 'catch up'
- Lack of physical intimacy
- Fatigue (not a mistake ... it was worth mentioning twice)
- Changes to the schedule and role division (it's not so easy to pop out to the shops anymore)

Keeping unity

Yes, this time of adjustment will obviously put pressure on your unity as a couple ... BUT that does not mean that you need to be pushed apart. Children are a joy and should be a source of great bonding even in this time. You are a team, and when a team is under pressure, they need to pull together.

As disciples, we know that this can only truly come from maintaining your focus on God. Here are some scriptures to help:

1 Corinthians 12:26-27

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

Romans 12:9-13

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

1 Peter 3:7

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.

Closing advice

So, when you feel pressure on your unity during the early days of child rearing, remember the following:

1. Be patient with each other and yourself. This time will pass, don't allow temporary pressure to create permanent scars
2. The quicker you adjust to the new schedule, the greater chance of finding a new rhythm in your marriage.

3. It is okay to mourn the end of your last chapter (married without kids). If that period was especially happy for you, it can be hard to let it go. Make sure that you process your feelings with a trusted friend or discipler so that you don't grow resentful roots.
4. As tired as you might be, make sure that words of encouragement and appreciation never cease to flow from your mouth. When all else fails, kind words can be the glue.
5. Much of the focus might be on the mother and baby during this time. It is not an easy task to lay down your life (including many of your needs) for your family. Staying close to God and being vulnerable with other disciples is necessary in order to have enough spiritual strength during this period.
6. Get advice from men and women who have gone through this period. Don't underestimate the power of a learning heart. Sometimes the smallest bit of advice can go a long way to maintaining your God entrusted unity.

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