LEARNING TO *REST*

IN HIM

substance
MOMS

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LEARNING TO REST IN HIM

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Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken.

Psalms 62:5-6

ON EAGLES WINGS

1

Sarah Gonzalez

Upon finding out I was expecting for a second time, friends and family congratulated me with hugs and smiles as I entered this new endeavour. It was complete bliss! Until the third trimester.

My first pregnancy was a breeze, but my second? Ha! Far from it. I struggled with terrible sciatic nerve pain, making it excruciatingly painful to walk even a few steps. I had never experienced pain this sharp before. Consequently, that trimester consisted of too much toddler TV for my two-year old and not nearly enough movement for either of us. My time became consumed with chiropractor appointments, some tears, and many prayers for healing. I was also on an emotional roller coaster, with no opportunity to exit from the ride. I felt tired, enormous, and lazy. I also felt so helpless and weak.

This trial really shook me. In fact, it shook me right off course. I started obsessing over the pain, which only made it worse. My thoughts were pessimistic, and everything my toddler did irritated me. I woke up each morning assuming it would be a difficult day. But then one evening during prayer, I became aware of this negativity and felt God nudging me toward the cross.

"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:30-31).

I knew then that God would help me walk through this trial. I knew my hope in the Lord would renew my strength, both mentally and physically. And it did, every single day thereafter. Through prayer and scripture, I found rest in the Lord.

While I felt far too heavy to soar on wings like eagles (literally), God renewed my tired soul daily. He reminded me of the extraordinary miracle of the tiny life being woven together in my womb. I became overwhelmed with gratitude for this baby He was blessing me with as He gently whispered to my spirit the encouraging words I needed to hear so badly. I felt God's presence wrap around me and allow me to trust Him and just rest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) What is something that consumes your thoughts and takes your focus off Christ?

2) How do you daily nudge yourself toward the cross when you need rest?

3) Is it your first thought to go to Christ when you need rest? If not, how can you change your actions so it is?

STAYED ON YOU

2

Keri Herzog

It had been one of those weeks when juggling the needs of my two small children had taken its toll on my own self-care. So one morning, I decided to take personal inventory and make a list of healthy habits to get myself back in balance.

The list included the usual: quiet time, exercise, and healthy eating. Then I wrote the words “mind care.” I paused for a moment...I knew I needed to linger and think about this one more. Before I was a mother, I had occasional bouts of anxiety or fears of certain situations, but after having children, worry had taken on a life of its own.

From the moment my precious babies took their first breath, they were looking for me to provide and create a safe and happy world for them. Though I found joy in being their “mama bear”, I had not anticipated the weight of this responsibility. *Were they eating enough to sustain them? Were they hitting their milestones? What if this horrible [fill in the blank] happens to them?*

That last question was the most detrimental for me. I found my mind mulling over “what if” scenarios on repeat. It was as if I had allowed the enemy to play “worst outcome” videos in my head, only to leave me feeling paralyzed inside. These thoughts were draining my peace and stealing my joy as a mother.

But scripture is clear that the enemy only wants to steal, kill, and destroy our lives. God does not want His children living in the bondage of fear, but promises to give us perfect peace when our mind is “stayed on Him”.

"You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3).

Being stayed on Him does not happen automatically for me. I often find my mind wandering into the “worry” zone. But now when these videos start to play in my head, I’m learning to press stop so I can instead press play on God’s promises. I intentionally practice redirecting my thoughts to His words. Because no matter how protective I am of my kids, I can’t anticipate every potential harm. It’s not my job. It’s His. It’s my job to trust and focus on Him. He is the only one who can help me look at life through the lens of peace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) What are some things you do to bring peace and balance into your life? Write them below.

2) What areas of your mothering would you like to replace with peace instead of fear?

3) Find one scripture verse you can memorize and recite to declare peace over your mothering instead of worry.

WADING THE WATERS 3

Annie Evelsizer

Monday morning arrived and I began the normal routine of preparing breakfast, rousing tired kids, double checking school bags and herding us all towards the goal of leaving on time.

On this particular morning as my toddler came into the kitchen, one look at her face reminded me of the night before…

While visiting the children's museum, one of the exhibit volunteers had handed her face painting markers and encouraged her to get creative while using her face as a canvas. Why I had allowed her to sleep with it on is another story – but without a doubt, she needed a bath before school.

I scooped her up, giving her a kiss on the top of her head as I drew a bath. She was still rubbing the dreams from her eyes as I carefully pulled off her pajamas, murmuring, "It's bath time! Your favorite!" Yet as I lifted her into the water, she decided bath time was not a good idea and reacted accordingly – with thrashing and screaming, as though her life hung in the balance while I frantically began scrubbing.

Suds rinsed, I began lifting her still shrieking form from the water, and as her dripping feet cleared the lip of the tub her screeching became one continuous sound, shifting from "No bath!" to "I WANT TO STAY IN!" without missing a beat, let alone pausing for breath.

In that moment, as my frustration spiked to match her sobbing, I remembered a recent conversation I had with a mom who had also waded the waters of a stubborn child.

She said, “It’s a compliment when your toddler throws a full-body meltdown with you. It means you are their safe place. They know without a flicker of doubt that you will NEVER leave or abandon them. And THAT is why they feel free to absolutely lose themselves with you, and no one else. You are their rest.”

“Then Jesus said, ‘Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest’" (Matthew 11:28).

In that moment as I squatted in the bathroom next to my toddler, I felt the very presence of Jesus kneeling beside me as I held her. Reminding me that as she finds rest in me, I will always find rest in Him. Even if I need to throw a tantrum first too.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) During times of anxiety and stress, what steps do you take to deliberately turn to Jesus? Journal your ideas below.

2) How do you encourage your kids to find rest in Jesus?

3) How can you model this for your kids?

YOU ARE ENOUGH

4

Esther Rhoades

Just the other day I was lamenting with my husband about the lack of rest in our current season. As a mom of a preschooler and two other vivacious children, I found myself moving at a pace that was far greater than my mental capacity would allow. The stress of finding the right routines, discipline strategies, and providing my children with quality childhood experiences was starting to manifest as sleepless nights and anxiety. I found myself striving to be present while juggling extreme exhaustion and the never-ending worry that I wasn't a good enough mom. Then on a particularly late-night, God led me to this verse:

"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 minds in Christ Jesus" (Phillipians 4:6).

As I reflected upon the truth of these words, God impressed something else on my heart:

Daughter, you are enough. Just being their mom is enough. Trust Me to provide and equip you with wisdom tailor-made for them. I want you to rest and trust Me. Just be. Invite Me in and let go of your expectations of yourself in this season. Surrender to the infinitely greater love I have for you and your children; after all, you are ALL My children.

Mama, we are God's children first. This means that He is always there to listen, comfort, convict and advise us. He longs to be invited into all of the thoughts we hold about ourselves and our children -- to give us the gift of rest as we trust Him to provide everything we need to love and raise our children well. He alone can silence the anxiety that robs us of rest and being present. We can just be, and it is enough.

Today as you go about your day, I encourage you to pause for a moment, examine your heart, and invite God in to assess your decisions and pace in parenting. Remember that as you surrender your anxiety or worries to Him that He will give you wisdom, and He will give you rest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) What areas of parenting do you need God to provide wisdom in for you?

2) When you hear that you are God's child first, what are your first thoughts?

3) How would your parenting change if you fully embraced that today, you are enough?

REST IS WORSHIP

5

Anita Matta

My kindergartener could not have been more thrilled when the first day of school rolled around and we pulled out her fabulously glittery unicorn backpack. But a few days later, she came home yelling that she "never wants to go to school again!" Why the change? They wanted her to take a nap! The audacity!!

To be honest, that's my first response to naps as well. There's too much to be done! Too many dishes to wash! Too many diapers! But what does God say about rest?

Exodus 16:23 says, "This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day..."

When God was setting up government for the Hebrews, he prioritized rest. For starters, he commanded one-seventh of their time be dedicated to Sabbath rest! I'd never really considered that I could honor God by resting.

When I encountered this concept of Godly rest, at first I balked, just like my child did. It felt like God would be honored more if I did more good things. After all, I can't accomplish anything asleep! But why do I think I need to be the one accomplishing things? By stopping to rest, I'm trusting that God is the one in charge; He's the one who will accomplish what is truly important.

Resting also involves recognizing the limits of my body and mind. When I rest, I worship God by acknowledging His greatness, and my frailness by comparison. The strongest person in the world is nothing in comparison to God.

When Jesus invited me to come to Him for rest, He didn't say he was going to wash my dishes, mow my lawn, or pick up the toys.

He invited me to trust Him. To trust that He was greater than all those things, and that I could have peace - even rest - when I say yes to Him. He needs my heart, not my constant flurry of activity.

God's grace really is enough to carry us through motherhood. Sometimes what you really need to do is lay down that glittery unicorn backpack full of all the things that must be done, and just take a nap!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) Is it difficult for you to rest during the day? Why or why not?

2) Do you think that rest should be a priority for your children?

3) Does Jesus' invitation to rest apply to you too? Think of one practical way you can draw closer to God today without doing more work and write it down.

JUST ONE THING

6

Amber Krueger

The day I'd been looking forward to finally arrived -- both of my children were in school full time! I'd finally regain some of the freedom I gave up since becoming a mom nine years before. I started to think of the possibilities...I could deep clean! I could pour time into my business! Go to a museum alone!

Yet when the time came, instead of feeling liberated and excited, I felt...lost. I didn't feel excited by all the possibilities; I felt crushed by the burden of all I could be doing. All I should be doing. I couldn't figure out what to prioritize.

That's because the last nine years of stay-at-home-motherhood had been exhausting to an extreme. And while I wanted to give myself permission to rest, it felt wasteful not to use my time to some greater end.

By the beginning of the second week of school, I had a breakdown -- the "sobbing hysterically alone in the shower" sort of breakdown. I knew I needed to spend some significant time in prayer, so I sat down with my prayer journal and prayed my heart out.

The passage God brought to my heart was the one in Luke 10 where Jesus is at Mary and Martha's house. I've heard that passage more times than I can count. Martha complains to Jesus because her sister isn't helping her in the kitchen. And Jesus responds, *"Martha, Martha... you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).*

Reading the passage again, the words jumped out at me: "Indeed only one." Just one thing -- spending time with Jesus.

So I sat. I prayed unhurriedly and without agenda. I listened. I worshipped. I spent time in His presence. And I felt Him say that out of all my roles -- wife, mother, friend, business owner -- my primary role is, and always will be, His daughter.

I then looked at all of my "shoulds." They felt like barnacles attached to me. Things I'd let others put on me that God never intended to give me. And in that moment I let them wash off of me, and I knew the freedom of only Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) How can you focus on your primary role as a daughter of Christ in your current season?

2) What things have you allowed into your schedule as a result of others' expectations instead of what God has called you to do?

3) Spend some time asking God to order your priorities today and ask him what can come off your "to do" list.

GOD'S GOT THIS

7

Jonna Meidal

The moment it happened my heart dropped down to my stomach and landed somewhere back up in my throat. I sat there speechless, stunned at what my daughter had just said.

“I’m too old to call you mommy now." Bam! *Why not just kick me in the gut while you’re at it?!* I thought.

I’m not really sure why this bothered me so much. I mean, I knew this time was coming. She had started not wanting hugs at drop-offs and only wanted to hang out with her friends, but anticipating change is a whole lot different than walking through it, right?

At the core of my sadness was one simple thing: I just missed her! I longed to be near her and make her laugh; I wanted to hear all of the details of her day and help fix her problems. I wanted to still be her protector! But she didn’t want that anymore.

How quickly change happens as a mom. One minute our children are prying open the bathroom door to be near us, and the next minute it’s us who are banging down *their* doors, desperate for connection. (The irony of this is not lost on me.)

So what’s a lonely mother to do? We can fill the void with so many things. Volunteering. Working. Shopping. Worrying. But the only thing we should be doing is spending more of our time with God.

“Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Surrendering our kids to God is actually a good thing - for them *and* for us. It teaches us to trust Him more while giving our kids the chance to run to Him instead of to us. And isn't that what our ultimate goal is as mothers - to guide our kids towards HIM!? But how can we expect them to do that if we aren't doing it ourselves?

Therefore, run to Him today. Run when your mama heart is breaking and you feel sad, lonely, or confused as to why your once sunny child is now emotional or withdrawn. Seek His face, put on your armor, and trust that God's got this, regardless of whether your kids call you mommy, mama, or mom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) Has there been a moment in your parenting where you kids didn't need you as much? How did you feel? (If you're not there yet, how do you think you'll feel?)

2) When your children are all grown (and maybe they already are!) what attributes and skills do you hope and pray they have?

3) How can you be trusting God to help you parent out of victory instead of worry or fear?

JOY WILL COME

8

Holli Aparicio

Beautiful mother, I've been where you are. You know the place I'm talking about. For me, it was on the floor in my bedroom closet, or sometimes alone in my car. Those were my favorite places to have a good cry when I was at my bitter end.

During one particularly difficult season of motherhood, we hired a babysitter to watch our kids for a few hours each week. Resisting my natural inclination to get something productive done during those hours, I usually opted to go for a drive on the country roads behind our neighborhood.

I would roll the window down, and feel the force of the wind at 55 mph. I would play my theme song for these drives, *Joy will Come*, at full volume, listening to it over and over. Tears streamed down my cheeks, tears holding a mixture of desperation, but also hope in a Savior whom I knew was incapable of letting me down. I didn't know how. I didn't know when. But I believed joy *would* come.

In those moments, Jesus never failed to comfort me. He became a refuge for my weary soul. Isaiah 40:11 reminded me how near I was to his heart in my mothering – *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*

My two daughters have grown into lovely teenage girls. Those places of deep struggle and desperation are in my rearview mirror now. But the principle of finding refuge in Jesus has stayed with me.

We have a standing invitation to come to Jesus for refuge. When we are weary. When we are desperate. When we feel sad. It's not

the car that was a refuge for me, or the closet floor. It was His presence - in *those* places - that wrapped around me and comforted me, assuring me that yes, joy *would* come. And you know what...*it did*.

And it will for you, too.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) Meditate on Isaiah 40:11. What stands out to you? Write your thoughts below.

2) What needs are in your life where you want God's gentle tending? How could you invite him to help you with those needs?

3) Isaiah 40:11 says that He gently leads those that have young. Think of the tenderness of the Father, gently leading you because he knows how hard it can be to be a mother sometimes. Journal how this makes you feel.

23 MINUTES

9

Kathy Morgan

It was 3:43 a.m. and I was quietly praying as I sat in the hospital labor and delivery waiting room for news on our daughter's first little one to enter the world. A text came through from our son-in-law: "Just born. Please pray."

This was NOT the text I was expecting, and definitely NOT what I was wanting. A myriad of emotions flew through my mind and heart. *Is my daughter alive? Is the baby going to be alright? WHAT IS HAPPENING???*

Fervent prayer accelerated quickly to begging. It took 23 long minutes to hear another update that all would be well. I immediately wanted to sob on the floor. *Oh Jesus, thank you for protecting them both!*

It turned out that our sweet little grandson had the cord wrapped twice around his neck and needed to be resuscitated.

In the weeks since his birthday, I've pondered those 23 minutes of waiting. The spirit of fear entered that waiting room with brute force and yet I simultaneously clung *desperately* to the promise and reality that Jesus alone was in control of the lives of my daughter and grandson. I knew that He was hearing every plea for the safety of their lives, yet I also believe that His plans are greater than my own. So, what if they were plans I didn't want? I fought with everything within me against that spirit of fear.

I have come to trust Jesus so deeply with my own life, but with my children it feels entirely different! I don't want them to experience any pain. Ever! Even now that they are out on their own, I am still inclined to try to control and protect them.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus tells us that His grace is enough in all situations, especially when fear stands at the door trying to overpower us. Jesus continues by assuring us that His power is demonstrated more profoundly when we experience the limits of our control and choose to rest in Him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) What are two of your greatest fears surrounding your children?

2) How do you combat those fears?

3) Do you physically and emotionally sense the peace of Jesus as you trust and rest in him? Why or why not?

Praise the Lord! How joyful are
those who fear the Lord and
delight in obeying his commands.
Their children will be successful
everywhere; an entire generation
of godly people will be blessed.

Psalms 112:1-2