

THE CHEERLEADER

for *tired* moms



A collection of posts
on surviving motherhood

| Lisa-Jo Baker

The Cheerleader for Tired Moms:

A collection of posts on surviving motherhood

{download or print in case of emergency meltdowns}



I hope you share this with your friends – let’s cheer on all the tired, wonderful, remarkable moms out there. But a few comments on sharing:

- Please link to my blog – inviting folks to visit there for the download.
- Linking the blog from FaceBook shares is also appreciated.
- Distribution of this e-book from your own website, or reposting any images or text on your own website is not permitted.
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Thank you for your support – cheering you on all the way!

By Lisa-Jo Baker

LisaJoBaker.com

[@lisajobaker](https://www.instagram.com/lisajobaker)

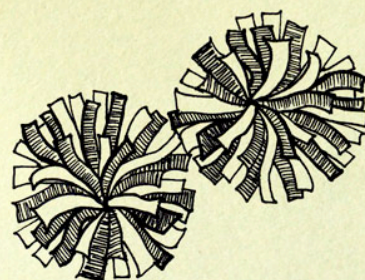


Illustration
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Hi. I'm Lisa-Jo,

I have three kids and sincerely believe motherhood should come with its own super hero cape.

Most days I can't find my car keys, my cell phone or my mind. Most nights I think my heart will burst wide open from all the messy love stuffed inside it for those sweetly snoring kids and most mornings I want to quit motherhood before I've even served the first bowl of Cheerios of the day.

I've worked full time outside the home, I've worked full time from home and I've worked long hours before kids ever came along for the ride. **I absolutely maintain that motherhood is the hardest gig I've ever had.** Like, by far.

And trying to survive motherhood while under the impression that other mothers somehow have it all together is dreadfully discouraging.

I know from personal experience. But I got over it. And promptly promised myself I would never dress up motherhood. I would always tell it straight. That it's the greatest passion I've encountered and also the most all consuming, gut-wrenchingly, exhausting, roller coaster ride of exhilaration I never could have imagined before birthing three children.

I write about it on my blog, LisaJoBaker.com. And every single bit of this little eBook is all there – on the blog. **But I thought for Mother's Day, and every day really, I'd love to put together my favorite and {hopefully} most encouraging posts about motherhood.** And give them all wrapped up in hope and joy and exhaustion to my favorite group of people – new moms. Because it's the gift I would have loved seven years ago when I was learning what it was like to think you'd never sleep again.

So sure, you can go read all these posts on my blog – and you can enjoy them here – all wrapped up pretty like for you. Cheering you on!

My oldest wrote me a note just yesterday morning that said I was "butiful." I think that sums up motherhood, does it not?

The butiful amazing world of being a mom. It should come with a built in cheerleader. I hope this might do the trick on your tireddest, hardest, I just-wanna-take-off-after-the-ice-cream-truck days. And nights.

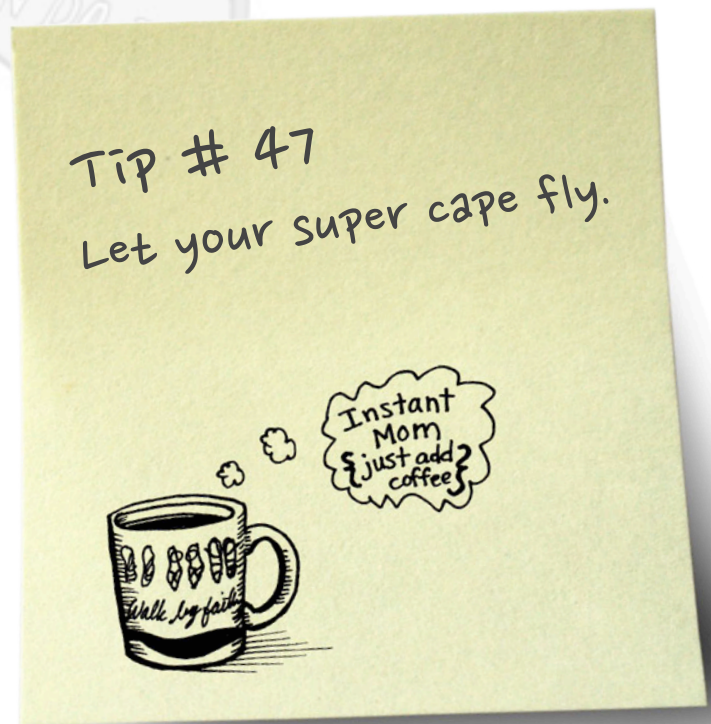
You got this. Even when you don't.

Love,

Lisa-IProbablyHaven'tWashedMyHairTodayButICan'tRemember-Jo

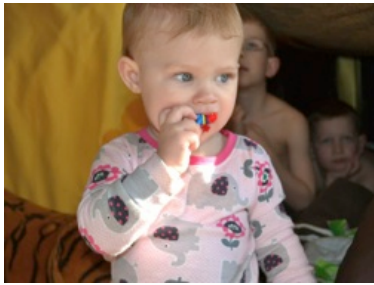
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The Best Ways *not* to Help a New Mom

It doesn't help me to think you have it all together.



It doesn't help me if your house is immaculate for the three hours this week that I come over to visit. If your kids are perfectly groomed. To see your menu planned for the entire week. To believe that you never have any "bad mom moments."

It doesn't help me to feel like you never lose it, **shriek like a banshee**, or want to take off running after the ice cream truck from time to time. It doesn't help me to see your perfect homeschooling plans, but never get a glimpse of the mess-ups, the projects that flopped or the kids who couldn't have cared less. It doesn't help me to think you think less of me because my kids will probably go to public school.

It doesn't help me to think you are always cool calm and collected or that you actually iron on a regular basis.

It doesn't help me to think you never forget show and tell, to put on make up, or your mind.

It doesn't help me to think that cracking open your Bible comes easier to you than logging into Facebook, because it doesn't to me.

It doesn't help me to think that your life is perfect. And I'm guessing it doesn't help you either.

So, for my part, you should know that I can be smitten with newborn love one minute and weeping with tired the next.

You should know that while I might know that I am walking on holy ground, that doesn't stop me from getting irritated at how often that ground is strewn with cracker crumbs and yesterday's socks. That the big kids are watching way more Bob the Builder and Mighty Machines than is healthy for them and that their eating habits have followed suit.

You should know that I often find them too big, too loud, too rowdy compared to my delicate new baby girl. **And that that feeling has surprised me.**

You should know that there are blanket forts in our living room I've ignored for days, carrots under my sofa that may have grown legs, mail that piles up and a playroom door I keep closed so as to pretend that I don't see how much it resembles a post-apocalyptic landscape.

For my part, you should know that my life is ordinary in all the very best ways. But that some days I fail to appreciate that. I dream of maid service and room service and a personal chef. But mostly, I just dream of having family in the vicinity instead of a plane ride away.

I guess what I'm saying is that, for my part, I'd like you to know that you and me sister, I think our stories have a lot in common.

And sometimes just saying that out loud is the very best way to help any kind of mom.

So, this is me, saying that out loud. Pass it on, won't you?

For the Days When You Want To Quit Motherhood

This post is for anyone who's at the one-year mark of motherhood.

This post is for anyone who's lost count of how many years she's been mothering.

This post is for me and this post is for you.

This post is for those days when "getting over yourself" is the last thing an exhausted, I-can't-take-it-anymore, run down mother needs to hear.



Can I just take your sweet face between my hands and look into your tired eyes and tell you what you're doing is exceptional?

Tell you that motherhood is the hardest thing I've ever done. Period. And I've worked for the UN on counter human trafficking, for NGOs on the Aids and orphan crisis in South Africa, as well a corporate law firm.

And I still maintain that having the 24/7 responsibility of a child is the hardest thing I've ever done. *By far.*

Being at some else's literal beck and call will lay you low. It will rob you of a sense of self that can take time and tears to rediscover in this new identity of mother.

Give yourself grace to realize that and to mourn the loss of who you were, before you begin to embrace the who you're becoming.

I remember when I was just a two-month-old mother and the baby would cry, looking over at my mom, an aunt, anyone else in the room and wondering why on earth they didn't pick him up?

I couldn't accept the daunting reality that his crying would be my forever responsibility.

There will be days when you just want to be done. When you want a pass. When you want to go back to your books and late afternoon naps and movie nights on the spur of the moment.

This doesn't make you a bad mom.

This makes you a human being going through some of the profoundest growing pains ever designed.

I have some small suggestions for those moments.

Sweet, brave mom, here is my advice to you:

1. Get more sleep STAT

Each time I've had a baby, I've often found myself in irrational arguments with Peter during those first few months. And he knows enough now to call a time out and tell me to go and take a nap. This used to make me mad and I'd fight it all the way till I passed out in the bedroom. And emerge hours later filled with a renewed love for life and baby and husband.

You need a babysitter, mom, husband or friend who can gift you with time spent sleeping. **Not cleaning, not watching TV, not grocery shopping. Just sleeping. It's essential.**

2. Take a time out

It does not make you a bad mom if you need a break. It makes you a wise one who is taking care of herself so that she can keep taking care of her baby. Whether it's a few hours at the mall, going to a movie or a weekend away. You will need this as much as you need sleep and oxygen if you are going to keep on keeping on. Make plans, sweetheart, right now.

3. Call a girlfriend

The daddy can't be all things to you. He just can't. Even if he wants to; even if he tries to. At some point you are going to need girlfriends who've been there, cried that and can offer a different kind of comfort. Surround yourself with them. **Don't let the baby cocoon leave you isolated.**

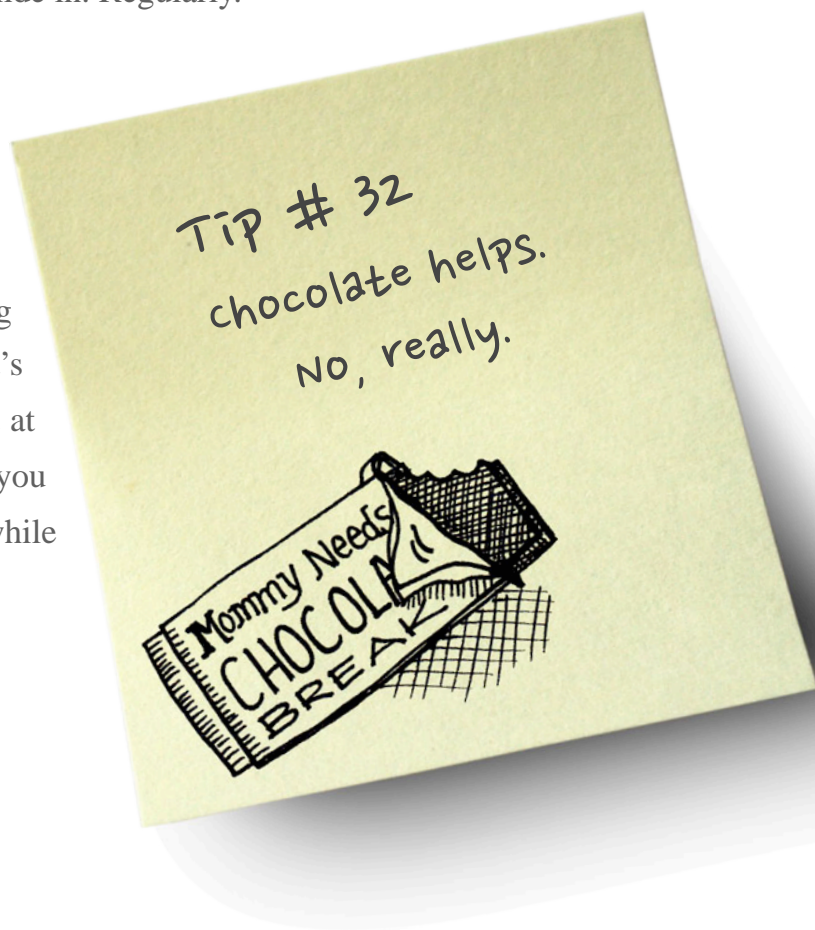
Seek out your friends, your mom, the kind lady at church or the next-door-neighbor with twins. You need a woman to confide in. Regularly.

4. Eat what you love, not just what you've got time for

Moms are notorious for eating leftovers or crackers or food that's cold, or fast to fix or forgetting to eat at all. Work in meals that you love, that you get to eat while still hot, and while someone else is holding the baby.

5. Chocolate

Enough said.



6. Get real with God

He's a parent. He knows what it feels like. He designed the system. Go ahead, tell Him how you really feel about it. **Vent. This is the most honest kind of prayer.** Give Him all your frustrations, your exhaustion, your desperation and hear how He listens to you.

Then know this – when you collapse at the end of a day; when the baby finally sleeps for a few snatched hours; when you close your eyes with no thought but the desperate need for sleep – He stays up, dear heart. He stays awake and sings over you. Sings! All through the night. Just for you.

*God promises to love me all day,
sing songs all through the night!*

~Psalm 42:5-7 (The Message)

7. Laugh & cry

Because there is so much of the ridiculous, the hard and the wonderful wrapped up in motherhood. Go ahead – let some steam off. Sometimes that takes tears and sometimes, especially with girlfriends who've been there, laughter will heal you best.

8. Know when it's time to ask for deeper help

This list, it's a beginning. But if it doesn't help. If you don't find your joy emerging from the fog. If you feel alone and isolated and desperate. Then you need to find a wise and professional counselor who can listen and give you the tools to help yourself.

This choice does not mean you are weak. It means you are strong.

I love you deep and wide and wish I lived close enough to come over with cookies or cake or celery if that's your fancy. But know this, you are not alone. You walk a familiar road trodden by thousands of moms over the decades who have struggled to find the balance between the miracle of motherhood and the quiet desperation that sometimes arrives in it's wake.

Just admitting that out loud – that may be the first step to starting to feel normal again.

The Only Way to Make it Through Most Days

“I’m afraid the land of perfect is a myth. We might feel we are skirting the borders with our dream, but the reality is those borders don’t exist because perfect doesn’t.”

~[Quitter, Jon Acuff](#)

There is no such thing as perfect.

Perfect doesn’t exist.

Perfect is not an attainable goal.

Perfect is merely a street sign at the intersection of impossible and frustration in Never Never land.

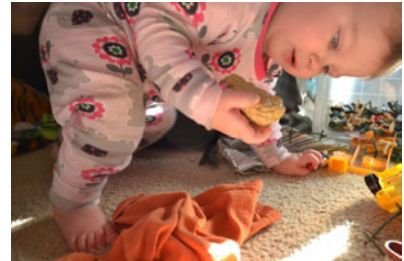


This realization is the only way I make sense of my days. **Because there is no such thing as “doing it all.” And especially no such thing as “doing it all perfectly.”** By my third child I am convinced of this.

The only way this family finds love and laughter in the midst of our days is by being willing to let perfect trickle through our fingers like so much sandpit sand. We don’t have perfectly nutritious meals or perfectly put away laundry. We don’t have a perfectly tidy living room or perfectly educational days. We don’t have perfect bedtimes or perfect play dates. And we certainly don’t have perfect obedience or perfect parenting.

Three children have taught me that a content household is rarely ever a perfect one.

We keep pace with one another and sometimes that pace is slow. Sometimes it requires leaving that load of dry laundry to fend for itself while parents take rowdy boys to the pool. Sometimes it requires compromising on the pasta sauce in order to get a boy's tummy full of pasta.



For a work-at-home mom it often requires a certain degree of playroom chaos in order to have a happy work environment for kids and mom. And at the end of long days letting go of perfect means releasing my family from heavy sighs and irritable grunts at the state of the house. Instead, I've learned that if we created the chaos together it's good for us to clean it up together. And that it may not be perfect if a six-year-old and three-year-old are my cleaning companions – but that the company's willingness is worth more than a perfect end result.

Sometimes I still miss it – at least the illusion of perfect.

And then a baby gurgles up at me, a boy blows me bedtime kisses from his bed stuffed full of a random collection of transformers that should have been in the play room, stuffed toys that should have been on his shelf, and snail shells that should have been outside, and my heart relaxes and I remember what I traded perfect for – a house full of real.

And perfect is rarely as interesting as real.

TIP # 4

Discovering long lost sippy cups of milk does not count as making your own yogurt.

Baby on Board*

*also, a missing sippy cup, filled with milk, from last week.

For When The Walls Are Closing In

He comes to find me in the dark. Eyes squinted against my bedside lamp, he whispers, **“Mama. Mama I gotta be by you.”**

Bad dreams and hot summer nights drive him out of his bed, down the hallway and into mine. And I, I who **crave space like oxygen** at the end of some days, open my arms to him. Because that’s what parents do.

We make room inside ourselves for our children.



It comforts me to know that the Christ himself knows how I feel. Weary after long days of being surrounded by others, **of being tugged from every side, of being followed and bothered for food, for touch, for recognition,** he withdrew.

*After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain **by Himself** to pray; and when it was evening, **He was there alone.***

Matthew 14:23

The need to be alone is a powerful one. A pull at the core of who we are and perhaps a reminder that only when we are alone are we able to hear clearly from the Spirit who resides in our hearts. Time alone, as every parent knows, is sacred ground. And when it’s in my grasp, I usually feel it trickle too fast through my fingers and I panic that it will be gone before I have figured out how best to spend it.

A good book, a hot bath, a meal eaten in peace. Caramel Frappuccino's enjoyed while reading a magazine. A slow walk down the grocery aisle. Music, loud music in the laundry room.

I spend my alone time in the ordinary, every day ways familiar to parents. But even the most mundane tasks, when done alone, take on a special quality.

There is reverence in the ordinary when I get to savor it with only my thoughts and the Spirit that loves me for company.

It is rarely grand. But it is always necessary.

Small, deliberate footsteps, however, ultimately find me out in the end. And in the midnight hour I reach out to my son and feel his long limbs, that just an afternoon before were full of fight and stubborn refusal to comply, fold into me. He is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones.

Small wonder that Jesus-brother-human-maker could never turn away anyone who interrupted him.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them,

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Mark 6:30-33

He understands.

He understands the feeling of claustrophobia that can set in after a long day at the center of many small, grabbing hands. And he shows me what compassion looks like in the very midst of that hungry need for space.

So I reach out and roll Micah into the sheet next to me.



Because he wants to be with me. Just like I want to want to be with Jesus. And we rest in one another.



Why You Should Be Kind To The Mom On Your Flight

When I board the plane and see her and the toddler in my row the first thing I think is, “There goes my nap.”



I'm traveling alone – something unheard of – and I will shamelessly steal extra sleep anywhere I can find it – especially at 30,000 feet above the ground.

She's juggling all those adorable baby rolls and bags of toys and tricks to keep him occupied when I slide into the seat next to them. I can feel she's nervous and it hits me how happy I am to be able to smile when he throws a toy at my leg and say, “It's ok; I have three.”

Three. How did this happen? How did I become the mother of three children? I always find it the most remarkable when I'm not with them. When I'm seeing that number through someone else's eyes. She smiles relief and I know we're partners now for the next 90 minutes hovering over the wide-open spaces between DC and Chicago.

She is patient and keeps up a running, quiet narrative to keep him distracted. She rocks him with her whole self and the plane rocks them both.

It's a wonder this art of wrapping oneself around a tiny human being to give them food, comfort, warmth, security.

The sun beats unrelenting against the closed shutters and the small baby beats big fists at the back of the chair and wails the frustration of the bored, tired.

She entertains. She laughs. She tickles. **We feed him snacks and each other encouragement because this is the way of mothers everywhere.** We know. We know on that deep, been up since 2am feeling, what it's like to hold teething babes and rock colicky infants and still break into wide smiles when they grin all goofy gums at us.

We know the rock and the rhyme and the rhythm of this strange dance that is parenthood.

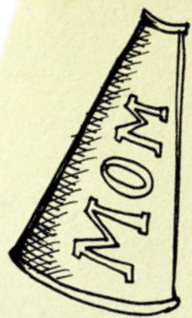
We rock and roll babes in the crook of tired arms on crowded airplanes because it's our calling and our gift. Yes, gift. The hard and the sleepless and the sometimes almost excruciating joy – it is all a gift that if we don't pause and appreciate will slip through our fingers like so many loads of laundry lost in the swirling, whirly gig of repetitive busy that can weigh a mother down.

But when I sit in that plane in that seat next to a young mom and her one-year-old **I can't help but admire her at work.** Because this is her work and her vocation and to see her in action is to appreciate the God who designed this living parable of why He would willingly sacrifice His whole self for us. There it is– the choice to give comfort, to feed, to nurture even when the recipient is unwilling and unappreciative.

And when he passes out, sweaty head curled into her shoulder, I wonder if any of the other passengers realize what went on here in row 18. If they know that **this young mom is in the thick of her workday and what an artist she is when she brings all her patience and love to bear on a baby oblivious to the effort it costs.**

I silently, inwardly applaud her.

Surely there is a standing ovation somewhere – if not in the aisles of this plane – then out there in the heavens that we're passing through.



Sometimes The Only Monday Morning List I Can Manage

Monday mornings can come hard and dark and dreaded.

I lie in bed and think about what [Ann](#) says about moments like these. **Just do the next thing.** Not the tenth thing down the list. Not anticipating the fifth, sixth, and seventh things all crashing down at once in a rushed row.

Just the next thing.

I stretch out my right arm. I stretch it out from under the cocoon of blankets and feel the sinew flex strong and can almost imagine the pinions unfurl from that hand. I stretch both arms and I arch them and let the words and images wash over me



*But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; **they shall mount up with wings as eagles;** they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

I roll over and let those wings filter through my mind's eye and their strength trickle into my small self as I sit up and stretch out both arms to the day. He will carry me. On the currents of his grace and provision and faithfulness. I only need to unfurl my wings and let Him.

I walk down the hallway to the blue and white bathroom and run the shower. The hot water drains away some of the night's bad dreams and Peter brings Micah in for a rinse. Toddler arms and legs wrap around me as we laugh in the steam and I wrap mama wings tight around him and we both lift in the moment.

“[I]nstead of measuring your day against what you think you can do, measure it against what you know I can do. There is no such thing as a day too tough for me – not a test day, not a moving day, not a my-parents-had-a-terrible-fight day.”

~Sarah Young, **Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions For Kids**

Peter sings in the mornings – made up jingles. And the rest of us listen while we get dressed, eat bagels, wrestle into socks and shoes – we giggle and float happy on the current that he trails behind him.

Just the next thing.

I brush out wet hair, put on mascara, pink lip gloss and the Detroit Tigers sweat shirt we've had as long as Pete and I have been together. It feels like home. Boys canter down the hallway and I count off all the daunting miles of *the list* we have already traveled this morning: showers, breakfast, clothes, shoes, glasses, school bags and nap toys all accounted for. And we're almost on time. And so far, no one has cried yet this morning.

Micah does in the car. He doesn't like the shirt he's wearing and I buckle him in over the wails and walk slowly and calmly back to the house for another option. One more simple thing done. And my heart feels pounds lighter since I woke up and the breeze holds me steady and today at least, I know I will set my course by Him and let Him be my one thing over and over again today.

“I don't give you the same amount of strength every day.

When you need more – and when you trust me more – then I give you more.”

~Sarah Young, **Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions For Kids**

One thing at a time, Monday. Simple steps. **Until we are flying.**

Why Motherhood Should Never Ever Be Graded

In the last week alone I have ordered food from the McDonald's drive through window, paid for the food, and then driven off without it. I have taken the highway I can drive in my sleep in the wrong direction and had to go all the way to the airport to turn around. I have forgotten my husband's phone number and consistently called my sons by the wrong names.

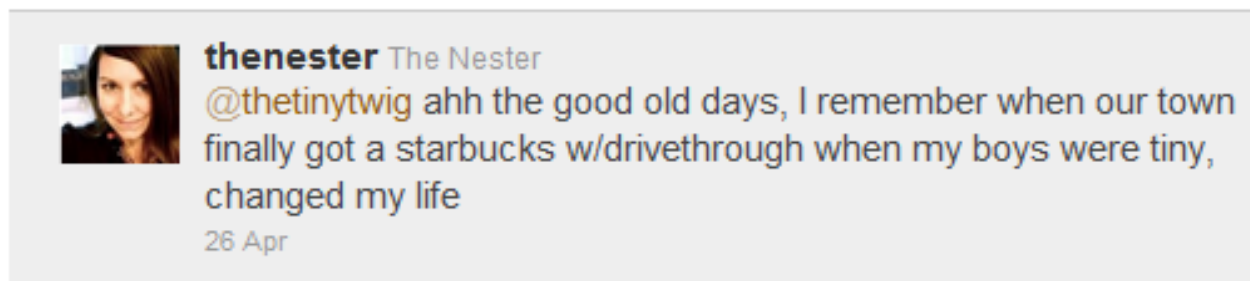
Yea, there's been a whole lot of tired and a week or two of feeling lost as to how to ace this whole motherhood gig.

And then you know what happened? A friend told me the most wonderful thing.

She said I'm not actually being graded. And some days just surviving is the greatest success.

It felt like I'd shed a baby hippo's weight worth of frazzled worry.

I looked around my upside down house with fresh eyes, took a deep breath, and decided that it was OK it didn't look like The Nester's. Since the Nester herself has three boys and deliciously confessed on twitter a while back that drive throughs were her salvation too when her kids were young. Tell me this doesn't make you want to hug her!



Yup, turns out everyone who's been there remembers what that kind of been-up-since-2am-would-willingly-barter-a-lifetime's-worth-of-sports-nights-if-the-husband-will-agree-to-take-the-six-am-baby-rocking-shift is like.

It is profoundly comforting to know you're not alone.
Or crazy.

And when I asked, the reassurances came in thick and fast and were off the charts wonderful and oh so worth sharing. Because maybe you're reading this at 2am and think you're not going to make it. Maybe you can't remember the last time you got to shower or use the bathroom alone. Maybe you haven't had the energy to cook a real meal in months and you're worried the only thing between your kids and scurvy is a Flintstones vitamin. Maybe you're walking a fine line between laughter and the hot, ugly cry.

Maybe you think you're failing at motherhood too.

Can I just look into your tired, tired eyes and say, **you're not.** *And sister, I've got the love notes from mamas the world over to prove it.*

Take a deep breath, these are for you:



I remember just being grateful that Jesus appreciated my efforts – **especially when the only real prayer time I could muster up most days was “Dear Jesus”** which I'd mumble just before I fell asleep each night. ~Deidra

After the great bake sale brownie disaster of 2009, I buy store bought baked goods. Like the Proverbs 31 woman, I like to bring my food from afar! ~Lysa



@Christie Leigh The guilt is mostly in my head. Most people understand and empathize.

My husband and I agreed when he was in school getting his master's degree and we had small children at home that he should shoot for being a "B" student, rather than an "A" student. Being an "A" student at school would mean being a "B" or "C" husband and father. ~Melissa



@Tila Moon sometimes story time is more important than dishes.

Oh, we too have had hard seasons of pizza — And the Farmer Husband says pizza includes all the food groups, so it's got to be good 😊

You're all together and you're all loving each other and that's all that

matters, sister... you'll find clothes to wear and there's always cereal to eat and we can all live on love. I so hear you. I so get it. ~Ann



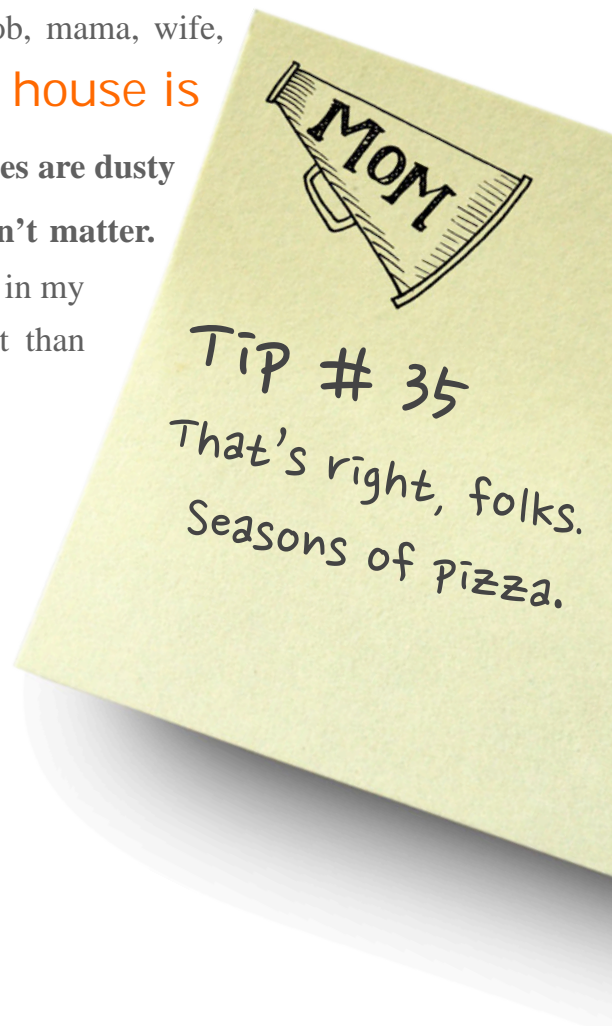
@Shanyn Silinski if everyone is healthy, laughing and we are together it's all good.

People ask me all the time how I do it all – full time job, mama, wife, blogging, book club, etc. – my answer is always, **my house is never clean.** I am behind on laundry, my end tables are dusty and cheerios are on the floor. But right now, that doesn't matter.

What matters is how much I love my family and the people in my life. Because love and attention are way more important than a few dust bunnies. ~Jessica



@Shayna Amenson pajama day is a-okay!



Did you get all that? Because that kind of encouragement is worth floating around in till your fingers turn pruny.



Forget how “they” say you should do motherhood.

Forget the magazines and the advice columns and the hundred rulers handed out by well meaning women that you feel you fail to measure up to every single day.

You are enough. Just as you are.

You in your PJs and the hair that hasn't been blow-dried since yesterday. And by yesterday I mean the last week before the baby arrived. You've got this. Even on the days it takes tears. Especially on those days.

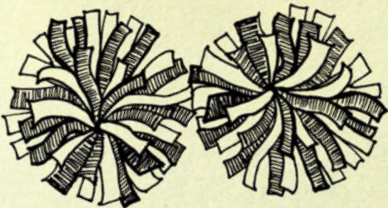
We're all holding your hand.

TIP # 19

one day

at a time, sister.

one day at a time.



What Mothers Can Do For One Another

Holding up the arms.

Rubbing the tired shoulders, folding the laundry, sharing the recipes, reminding each other about free donut days and birthdays and showering grace when we're late to the preschool pick up.

Not comparing our kids.

Celebrating the victories.

Weeping the pain.

Delivering the casseroles.

Sharing more than just fine.



Rocking the colicky babies, offering the girls nights out, teaching the best teething gels, powders, rings.

Sending the cards, loaning the good boots, complimenting the jeans. Sharing the best books, driving the car pool, ignoring the squabbling kids, making time for the catching up. Coming when she calls when her man's out of town.

Showing up with the Starbucks and sticky buns.

Telling her, she can. Especially on the days when she's still wearing her pajamas. Telling her to be kind to herself, and that comfy clothes are always the right choice.

Not comparing.

Not comparing houses or laundry piles or kids' behavior.

Cheering.

Cheering for each others' dreams, kids, work, art, new hair cut.



Crying alongside. Holding on. Hoping. Passing the tissues. **Buying the chocolate.** Holding the hands. Opening arms to the grief. Patiently walking the valleys, flash light packed, stop watch left at home.

Believing the best, giving the benefit of the doubt, calling. Complimenting. Spending time in each others' kitchens, laundry rooms, living rooms, cars. Meeting up for breakfasts, sending notes just because. Praying. Cracking knees to the mat and praying for her story, her life, her rabid fear of parenting.

Sharing the mess ups, the upside downs, the glimpses into your chaos. Not cleaning up before she comes over. Being OK with being seen just as you really are.

Welcoming her.

**Welcoming her into your real life.
So she can exhale.**

And you can be encouraged.



The Tired Mom's Creed

For the days we are running on empty. For the days we just don't think we have it in us to read one more story, play one more game of Uno, wash one more round of sheets. For the days when we think everyone else has it altogether. For the days we're sure anyone else would do this job better.

For those days. You know the ones.

Repeat after me:

1. I shall not judge my house, my kid's summer activities or my crafting skills by Pinterest's standards.
2. I shall not measure what I've accomplished today by the loads of unfolded laundry but by the assurance of deep love I've tickled into my kids
3. I shall say "yes" to **blanket forts** and see past the chaos to the memories we're building.
4. I shall surprise my kids with trips to get ice cream when they're already in their pajamas.
5. I shall not compare myself to other mothers, but find my identity in the God who trusted me with these kids in the first place.
- 6. I shall remember that a messy house at peace is better than an immaculate house tied up in knots.**
7. I shall play music loudly and teach my kids the joy of wildly uncoordinated dance.
8. I shall remind myself that **perfect is simply a street sign at the intersection of impossible and frustration** in Never Never land.
9. I shall embrace the fact that in becoming a mom I traded perfect for a house full of real.
10. I shall promise to **love this body** that bore these three children – out loud, especially in front of my daughter.

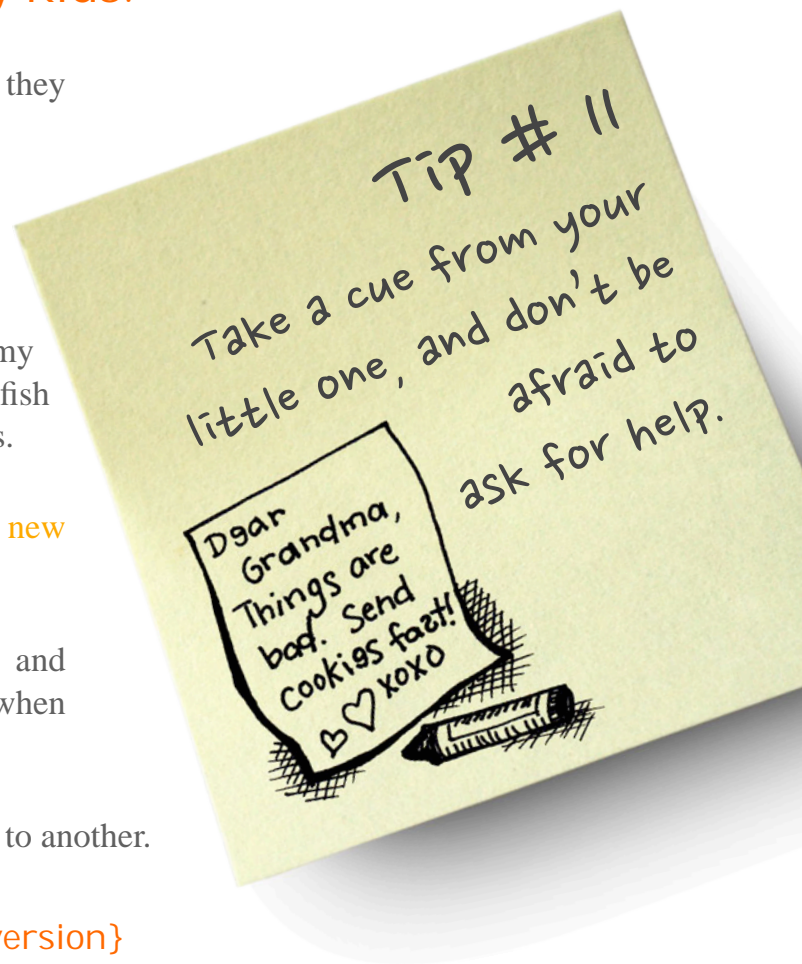
11. I shall give my other mother friends the gift of guilt-free friendship.
12. I shall do my best to admit to my people my “unfine” moments.
13. I shall say “sorry” when sorry is necessary.
14. I pray God I shall never be too proud, angry or stubborn to ask for my children’s forgiveness.

15. I shall make space in my grown up world for goofball moments with my kids.

16. I shall love their father and make sure they know I love him.
17. I shall model kind words – to kids and grown-ups alike.
18. I shall not be intimidated by the inside of my minivan – this season of chip bags, goldfish crackers and discarded socks too shall pass.
19. I shall always make time to encourage new moms.
20. I shall not resent that last call for kisses and cups of water but remember instead that when I blink they’ll all be in college.

~ with love from one tired mother to another.

[{click here to download the printable version}](#)



Having a Bad Day Doesn't Make You A Bad Mother

You've kept your temper all day against the onslaught of his. You've given grace and he's yelled that he's running away and started off down the block with face red and furious. You've chased after, you've told him people don't leave this family, you've loved and patiently intervened one hundred different times when he's been angry in one hundred different ways that his little sister is sucking up the time and attention he wants, needs, demands.



You've given him the right color cereal bowl, you've helped her put her shoes on, you've cleaned the dishes and packed the snacks. You and your man have juggled whining and zipping coats and finding socks; who cares if they match or not – everyone finally has shoes on. **You've done it right, you've been reasonable in the face of irrational toddlerhood** and you've bent low to meet the

needs of three tiny humans straining against their own limitations. You've reminded yourself you're the grown up and you've tried real hard to act like it.

You get it right.

Some days you get it right, right up to the finish line.

And then he flings his tooth brush, he dunks his head in the bath water while wrapped in a towel. He refuses to quit asking for that one last snack and it's easy – **it's easy to let the temper pour out of you like a hot rush of lava and it can feel so good.** Clenched fists and jaw and gut, you have a bad moment easily as irrational as his.

Then you take a deep breath. You sit down on the sofa. Your husband tells you you're doing OK. And it's hard – it's hard not to let the wind of the day get knocked clean out of you. It's hard not to wash your hands of it all and listen to the voice that tells you you're no good at this. The voice that whispers you're a disaster of a mother.

You know the one.

The voice so familiar it sounds almost like your own. The voice that's always there when the dinner doesn't turn out right, when you forget to sign the field trip form, when you're days behind on their math homework, when the dog jumps the neighbor's fence. Again. That voice that alternately laughs like a manic jackal at the long list of everything you get wrong or whispers into your soul that you're no good at this. No good, again.

The voice that thinks bad days make bad mothers.

Maybe you're too tired right now to recognize it, maybe you're too overwhelmed by a new week, maybe those dishes from last night with the pasta still stuck in little chunks make it hard for you to see anything that isn't in the line of sight of the sink, so let me say it for you.

Let me remind you, friend, **that voice is a liar and a cheat. It will rob you of the rest of the day, it will hack away at the good parts,** it will spit on the beautiful moments that happened right there in the minivan in between meltdowns. Those magical, parenthetical moments when everyone is laughing and the world is full of the glory of new beginnings and they look like a seven, five and nearly two year old.



Buy ear plugs if you have to – turn up the music, dance in the fact that you are doing it – you are mothering and it's the hardest gig for the most demanding audience. Don't waste the good moments on that voice. Don't listen. Learn to tune it out and run to your kids instead. Run and hug and laugh away the bad moments. Say sorry when you need to and stay down on your knees a little longer, look around and see how the world is small and big at the same time and it's right there in your hands.

You haven't dropped the ball – you've just had a bad day.

It's the Moments No One Knows About That Matter

Boys clamor for more ice cream and the baby wants milk.

The day winds down slow and rough and my head aches between the whining of one and the frustration of another. I can't find his favorite bear; I hear rudeness leak out of every syllable his brother speaks.

This is the hard love.

The biting down on a tongue that wants to whip and lash out at them. The deliberate quiet voice, which is not my default. The refusing to rush into their over tired, frenetic pace.

The baby grabs two handfuls of hair, pulls us nose to nose and laughs crazy until she starts to cry.

I wade through the familiar evening routine of surviving bedtime and wrap thoughts of **Sara** around me. They make me strong.

At the end of all things we will bring only what we have given away with us.



Whether **we rented or owned** a home won't matter. Neither will the kind of car we drove. No one will ask what our fall wardrobe was like or if we ever mastered the art of styling our own hair.

But what we lavished on others – that will matter.

Stories of the truckloads of care, concern, love, friendship, and encouragement that **Sara** gave away during her life are surfacing all over the Internet. Suddenly the woman who was neither wife nor mother has hundreds coming forward to testify to how **their lives were shaped by her.**


I pick up the blue light saber and a single stranded sock.

I offer the black lab stuffed toy in lieu of the missing brown bear.

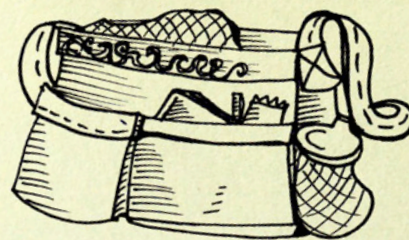
I bend down to the son who made me want to wipe that smirk off his face with rough words and whisper instead, “I choose to love you, Jackson.”

I think of **Sara** who loved so well and so hard in corners of lives that no one ever knew about until now.

And I walk down the dark hallway to rock the baby.



Tip # 32
choose joy.



For When You're Tempted to Just Lose It With Your Kids

The bacon sizzles hot and fat in the pan. The microwave sings alongside and dust motes dance in the sun along my window frames. **Me and the house exhale loudly.** The morning tornado of boys has been safely delivered to preschool, the baby is sleeping and other than Kenny Chesney on the radio I'm alone and it is good and quiet and warm here in the morning of my own choosing.

I think about silence and how much I like it these days.

How a dream weekend would involve me and Pete, a ginormous mattress, and hours of uninterrupted sleep. Yep, just sleep. The muscles in my neck are hunched and knotted and it's coming back to me how much a tiny baby can weigh after hours of holding and rocking and feeding until she rivals a young elephant calf for seeming body mass.



I've thought and walked and made art boxes for the boys this past month. I've forgotten my phone in the car overnight and forgotten that I'd forgotten it. I've participated in mother-son karate and planned long

trips to **big, muddy parks** with small creeks for boys to feel big and bold and as wild and free on the outside as they imagine themselves on the inside.

I've soaked up long conversations with friends who love **words, kids, and the woods** as much as we do.

And I keep coming back to the now in my life that is motherhood. This central season of wild, temperamental weather that woos and frustrates me sometimes in the very same moment. *Unpredictable as a high veld storm. Passionate as Rome. Rarely ever quiet.*

What is it we seek in our homes? Justice or quiet? Maturity or mere tranquility?... **Parenting is a process of regular disturbances for a high and noble end. ... We are to train and instruct our children. Training is sometimes painful, occasionally noisy, usually bothersome, and always purposeful.**"

~ Devotions for Sacred Parenting, Gary Thomas

When I dropped Micah off this morning it was painful, noisy and bothersome. His red, angry face mirrored his mad heart. Jackson had brought something of Micah's in for show and tell. Micah wanted it back. Micah wanted the morning snack the early arriving kids were just finishing up. He didn't want milk. He did want me. He also didn't want me.

And I just wanted to snap and yell and demand obedience apart from reason.

Regular disturbances for a high and noble end.

I go down on my knees and try to imagine myself behind those sky blue eyes streaming frustration and a desperate need for shared control over the small moments that matter to a three-year-old. I let Jack show the toy to his teacher and then tell him we're giving it back to Micah. Instead of hissing what I'm thinking, "If you don't stop crying this second, I'm leaving and taking this stupid toy home with me" **I try to see the world from inside his head.**

A mom-free landscape stretches ahead. And it can come as an adventure in independence or a lonely journey pockmarked by last, angry words.

I rub his back. I wet a paper towel and wipe it gently over his hot eyes. His breathing slows. And when a teacher offers up extra graham crackers and yogurt, I quickly claim some for



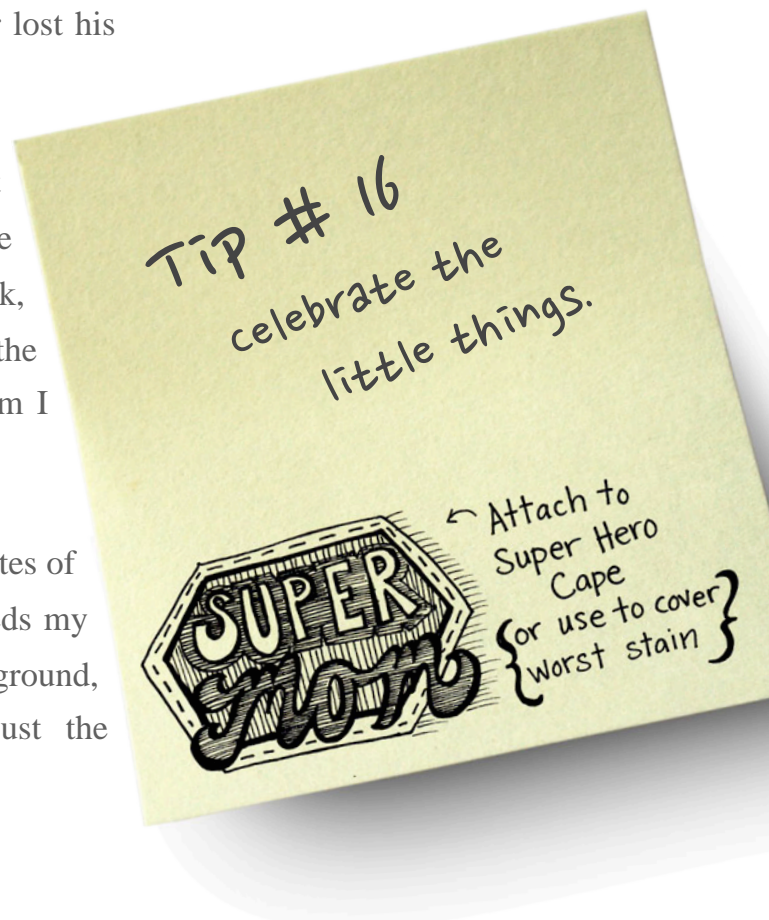
Micah. He sits. He eats. Slowly. Cautiously watching me. I wink at him. He eats some more. Exhales. Drinks milk.

**A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1.**

Why have I never read my kids into that verse? **Why is it ok for me to yell and not for them?** What kind of day would I have if Peter lost his temper with me right as I was leaving for work?

Micah clears his plate, moves over to the carpet and circle time. And then he gives me the thumbs up. Our universal cymbal for, “I’m ok, mom, you can go now.” A grin whispers at the corner of his mouth. I smile so big back at him I can almost hear my heart exhale.

So I come home to bacon and eggs and 45 minutes of writing and thinking and eating before Zoe needs my arms again. Kenny is still singing in the background, I’m feeling deliciously full, and it’s not just the breakfast.



What A Mother Needs To Keep Running {So She Doesn't End Up Running Away!}

I'm a mini van-driving mom. And I love it. Both being a mom and my sky blue mini van with enough room for another parent, my three kids, a couple of their friends and all the random collection of back packs, soccer balls, swords and snacks that inevitably make the journey with us.

This week I'm traveling for work. Alone. And I laughed out loud in a dark Arkansas parking lot when I saw the rental car I'd been given – a mini van.

Motherhood isn't a sweater we can shrug out of when we feel like it. It's a change in our DNA.

It's what makes us want to comfort the mom with the crying toddler at 3,000 feet, what makes us smile at the dad wearing a baby through airport security, what makes us tingle all over at the anticipation of 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep.

I open my white mini van on a dark and rainy night in Razorback country and I'm smiling so hard to myself at this secret the mini van and I are sharing. There's the seat where Zoe's chair would normally go and Jackson would be over my right shoulder and Micah all the way in back yelling directions, questions and instructions I can barely hear from way up front.

But tonight the car is crazy quiet. And I get to choose what's on the radio and no one will ask me, "are we there yet?" I've already slept three hours on the plane, unhindered by embarrassment – another fringe benefit of motherhood – sprawled across three seats with my cheek resting on my computer bag. The deep exhausted sleep is totally worth the strange imprint I'm sure I woke up with.



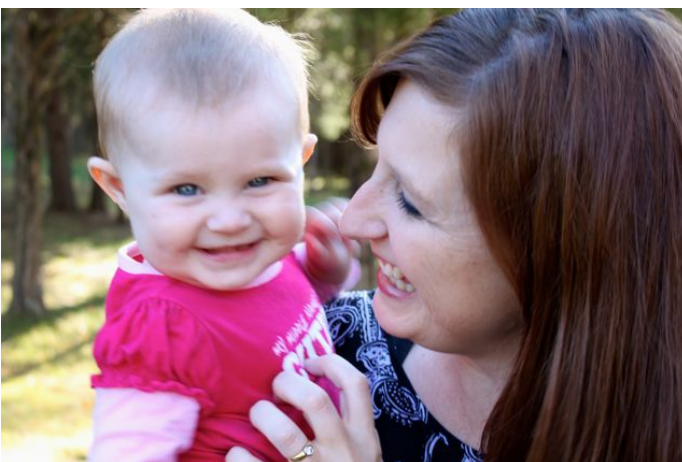
I miss my kids. But I find there's something inside of me that's been lacking oxygen and suddenly I can breathe and I take deep gulps of being alone in that big, beautiful mini van.



It's dark and raining and there's nothing ideal about the driving conditions except my heart that is looking around with fresh eyes, remembering the me that lives inside this mother's DNA.



There is a good man stewarding those kids we made so I am not afraid to say my tight, monkey hug good byes to them and drive an Arkansas mini van down this rainy road with prayers of gratitude for stolen moments alone.



I don't know a mother who isn't better for time alone.

Time without a hundred hands all held out waiting, asking, holding, poking, clinging. **Time without**

someone constantly in your me-space. Time where

you get to cut only your own food and don't have to be strategic about planning bathroom breaks and outings aren't scheduled around someone else's nap schedule.

Some days you don't realize how over-stimulated you are until you're in a car alone listening to the rhythmic thud of wipers across the wind screen and you can almost cry from the beauty of it.

Alone is essential to a tired mom because it's really time to spend listening to herself – her own thoughts and prayers and desperate ideas for creativity and plans and a future longer than next week's school recitation of "Chicken Soup and Rice."

I may be driving toward Siloam Springs, AR for work, but I am headed toward time spent apart from my everyday crush of the urgent, the predictable and the routine.

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Mark 6:31

I turn off the freeway and find a drive through chicken place. There's a hotel room waiting for me and eight hours of uninterrupted sleep ahead. A shower without someone knocking on the bathroom door and a bed that won't have two extra people in it when I wake up.

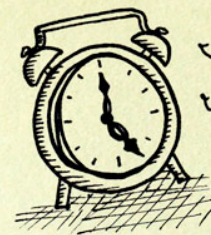
I am not running away from this mothering DNA of mine, I am simply remembering what it needs to keep running.



TIP # 25

You've got this.

You do.



I think I can...
I think I can...
I think I can...

Grace for the Working Mother and Her Guilt

This is not about whether mothers should work or should stay home.

This is not about whether it's better to home school or go the public, or Montessori or other route.

This is not about whether it's harder to work at home or out of the home.

This is simply a whispered, "I know," to the Sunday night, getting ready for work tomorrow, mamas.

The ones who are right now wiping down the counters, packing up the lunch boxes, sorting the socks, going through the mental gymnastics of gearing up for another week of good-byes. The ones preparing themselves for the waves of weekend homesickness that will hit when 5am comes early and preschool or daycare drop offs come inevitably. This is for the brave moms who know the ache of early good-byes.



For the ones who will commute hours before the rest of us get up because that's what it takes to keep home a place of food and warmth and security. For the courage it takes to trust your children to someone else's care. For the ones who beat themselves up harder, longer, more ruthlessly than the rest of us could possibly imagine.

This post is for the women who are short on grace for themselves.



I hear you. I know you. I lived in your shoes for long years and it is hard. And there are voices that can make us feel small. Make us feel achey breaky in our bones. Voices that lie about the quality of our mothering and try to steal the joy of time spent with our children by making us worry about the time spent apart.

My Sunday night sisters, I have listened to the crackly static of a nagging voice that whispers, deserter, and hear me when I tell you that that voice is a liar.

I know that going to work when you want to be home can feel like being trapped. It can make you want to beat your head on the wall. It makes you shrink next to those who point out what you should be, especially when it's what you want to be. It can be an endless cycle of self beratement.

But for those of us in that place and season, **we lift up our eyes to the hills** and help comes. The Holy Spirit ministers tenderly, bandaging wounded hearts and restoring what the deceiver has tried to destroy. We need grace from others because goodness knows we rarely get it from ourselves.

And when the crackly static of the nagging dies down there is another voice and **He whispers, provider.**

He sings over you.

He is waiting for you in the morning as you struggle to wake up. When the glare of the bathroom lights blind and tired eyes fight the lenses they need to face the day, He is there.

He sings, *She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family.* (Proverbs 31:15)

You are no less and no more than the mothers who get to stay home.

God did not give them a pass and you a punishment. You do not need to apologize for the fact that you work. You do not need to be embarrassed.

We practice dying to our own desires every day *with each good-bye, each desperate hug, each meal prepared and left to be eaten in our absence.* We walk the hard path of trust. Trusting that the God who built our kids will parent them in our absence, will grow them in courage, and teach them over time that this is what love looks like.

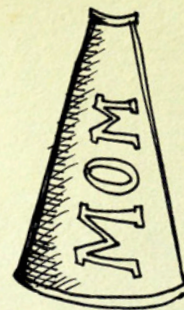
Gritty, committed, and determined to do what is necessary.

And drenched in grace, friends. Drenched in grace.

TIP # 41

NAP time is good for everyone.

Yes, you too.



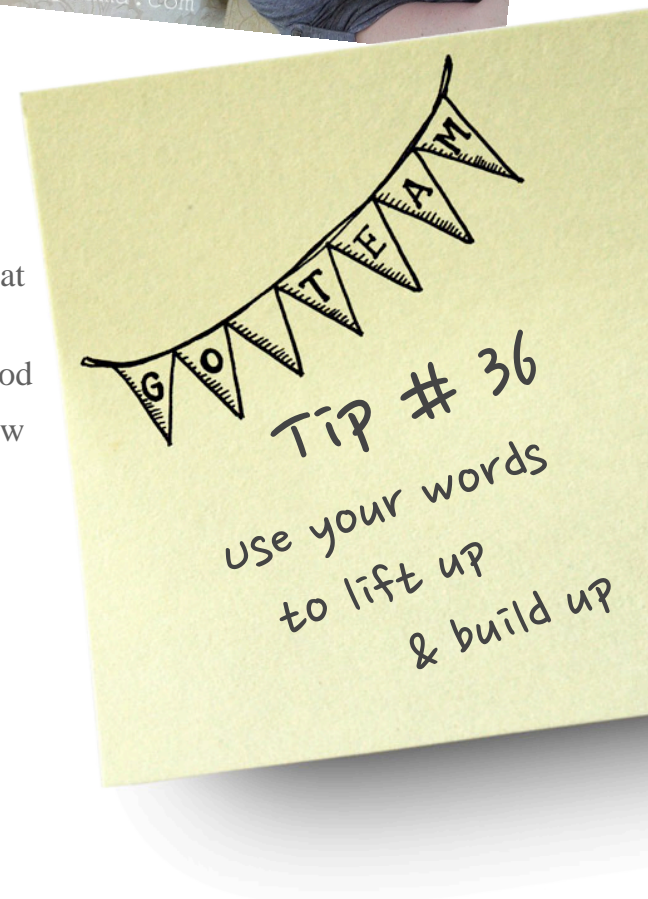
Bonus: 100 Ways To Help A New Mom

Thank you to everyone who encouraged me through each of my three seasons as a sleep-deprived-deeply-exhausted-and-utterly-ecstatic new mom. I'm delighted to pass it on...



1. Fold her laundry – especially all the socks
2. Leave immediately when the baby falls asleep so she can nap
3. Bring chocolate
4. Don't tell her to call if she needs anything, just drop by and help with everything
5. Take the big kids out for a play date
6. Tell her she's a hero
7. Bring her food in disposable dishes so she doesn't have to deal with washing or returning them
8. Don't tell her to **carpe diem**
9. Cry with her
10. Laugh with her
11. Share details of what you love about her baby
12. Watch **Up All Night** with her
13. Don't tidy your house before she comes over to visit – **it doesn't help her to think you have it all together**
14. Tell her a day will come when she will sleep again
15. Make her a 2am nursing station on **Pandora**
16. Email her a bunch of fun **deals links she can surf while nursing**

17. Make sure she's actually in 1 out of every 1,000 photos she's taking { thanks [Natalie](#) for being that person for me! }
18. Take [candid pictures](#) of her in the new daily routine
19. Bring diapers when you visit
20. Offer to drive her on errands and stay in the car with the baby
21. Be honest about how hard motherhood can be
22. Text her encouraging messages throughout the day
23. Come over and hold the baby so she can have her arms back for a while to do chores or cook or catch up on anything that's driving her crazy
24. Tell her to keep her phone on vibrate so you can call without being "that person who woke the baby."
25. Don't let her become [isolated in the baby cocoon](#) – invite her and the baby out so she can reconnect with friends
26. Never expect her to show up anywhere on time
27. Bring her lip gloss
28. Massage her neck and shoulders
29. Run her a hot bath
30. Don't imply that breast feeding should be a breezy walk in the park; let her know it's normal to struggle sometimes getting the hang of it
31. If she chooses to go the bottle route, please let her do so guilt free
32. She is just discovering the hard world of mother guilt – please don't do or say anything to add to that burden
33. Don't share any horror stories related to motherhood
34. Protect her from turning on the news in her first few weeks of being home
35. Vacuum
36. Bring fresh flowers
37. Take out any dried up bouquets
38. Paint her toe nails
39. Tell her she's beautiful
40. Don't tell her by now your kids were all sleeping through the night



41. Especially if by “sleeping through the night” you mean from 1am to 5am.
42. Remember that your memories of new motherhood have the romantic haze of distance
43. Wash her dishes without being asked
44. If you come over for a meal, please bring the meal and then clean it all up afterwards
45. Let her know it’s normal to stand hunched over a sleeping baby just listening to them breathe
46. Anytime she is disappointed by her new figure remind her that she grew a human being – that’s a miracle and turns out miracles need room to grow
47. Don’t bring over any magazines that feature celebrities in swimsuits 6 weeks after giving birth
48. Ask her what the one chore is around the house she wishes she could get to and do it for her
49. Always bring your camera when you visit
50. Print and frame one of the zillion photos she emails of the baby; include baby’s name and birth date {it blew me away when my friends did this for me!}
51. Bring toys/games over for the older kids when you visit
52. Tell her it’s OK to feel like you want to **quit motherhood** some days
53. But tell her that Trace Adkins is right and **she’s gonna miss this** one day
54. Don’t just make a hand print of the baby – make one of mom and/or dad’s too for a fun comparison keepsake
55. Bring her a **Memory Keeper Box** for that hospital bracelet, first lock, or even those **first few pairs of shoes or favorite toys**
56. If she has to go back to work, assure her God will be watching over that precious baby. She is brave if she gets up **while it is still dark to provide** for her family
57. Tell her **pizza covers all the food groups**
58. Hold the baby so she can get a shower
59. Bring over the **Pride and Prejudice (BBC Series)** boxed set for all those dinner {for the baby} and a movie {for her} months
60. Ask her which baby items she still needs – get her those instead of the cute clothes you have your eye on
61. Assure her you understand that while she **might know that she’s walking on holy ground**, that doesn’t mean she won’t still feel irritated how often that ground is strewn with cracker crumbs and yesterday’s socks
62. Admit motherhood is one of the hardest things you’ve ever done
63. Go ahead and quote that goodie-but-oldie, **“It’s not brave if you’re not scared.”** {Thank you Ben Affleck}

64. Warn her everyone will have an opinion on how she mothers but at the end of the day, hers is the only one that matters
65. Assure her **motherhood is not graded**; some days just surviving is victory enough
66. Tell her that drive-throughs are the best friends of mothers-with-sleeping-babies everywhere
67. Keep a pack of **Thank You Cards** handy in case she freaks out late one night that she hasn't thanked anyone for all the meals
68. Never expect a thank you card from a sleep deprived new mom
69. Tell her **there is no such thing as "doing it all."** And especially no such thing as "doing it all perfectly."
70. Reassure her that sometimes the love and happiness in a home is directly proportional to the mess.
71. Send a special prayer, encouragement or blessing addressed to the baby via snail mail
72. Turn the music up and dance with her and the baby
73. Suggest that the greatest Pandora station for soothing baby music that mama can also love has to be "Winter Song" by Ingrid Michaelson and Sara Bareilles
74. Take her (and the baby) for a walk
75. Stock her fridge with necessities anytime you come over – like milk, bread, eggs, yogurt, ice cream etc – in case she isn't up for grocery shopping
76. Watch the baby for her while she goes grocery shopping
77. Suggest she spend 15 extra minutes just reading in the magazine aisle
78. Tell her it's normal to be **smitten with newborn love one minute** and weeping with tired the next

79. Encourage her that a content household is **rarely ever a perfect one**

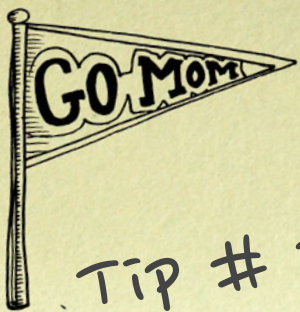
80. Remember to **always be kind to the mom on your flight**

81. Bring a goodie bag over for the new mom and not just the baby when you come to visit

82. If you're too far to bring over a meal, tell her dinner from her favorite delivery place is on you

83. Tell her there's no shame in cereal for breakfast, lunch and dinner

84. Make up midnight snacks for her to grab when she's up feeding the baby



TIP # 29

Do not isolate.
lather. rinse. repeat.



85. Tell her not every photo needs to be perfect – sometimes the closer to real life, the better

86. Give her the [The Girlfriends' Guide to Surviving the First Year of Motherhood](#) for when she needs to laugh
87. Give her [Devotions for Sacred Parenting: A Year of Weekly Devotions for Parents](#) for when she needs to be inspired
88. Tell her matching socks are highly overrated
89. Wash the baby bottles for her
90. Tell her not to sweat store bought baby food, disposable diapers or pacifiers - whatever works, works
91. Reassure her that perfect is merely a street sign at the intersection of impossible and frustration in Never Never land
92. Tell her [motherhood should come with a super hero cape](#), a really cute one with sparkles
93. Buy her sparkly nail polish
94. Tell her not to sweat everything Pinterest tells her she should be doing, baking, making and crafting for the baby
95. Encourage her to embrace PJ days – even if they last for weeks
96. Encourage her also to go spend two glorious hours at the hair dresser while you watch the baby
97. Tell her about all the women who did all these things for you
98. Assure her that just passing along the encouragement one day is thank you enough
99. Remind her it's the ordinary days that make the extraordinary memories
100. Promise her it will just keep getting better

Because **motherhood**
should come with a *Super Hero CAPE* and a
CHEERLEADER



With Love,

I love being on this motherhood journey with you.

I'd send you a super hero cape if I could.

But my posts for free by email may be the next best thing. Just [click here](#) to join me on this daily journey of crazy tired and totally awesome.

You can also follow me on twitter [@lisajobaker](#) or stop by my [Facebook](#) page.

Remember, you're much braver than you realize.

With much love,

Lisa-Jo

