The Journey of Motherhood

A devotional created especially for Moms



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

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Ending the Comparisons that Prevent Real Relationships

By Lisa-Jo Baker

I knew a mom who lost all her baby weight quickly, who didn't have to drop off her son at day care every morning, and who laughed at the easy familiarity of motherhood when it seemed like a strange and scary land to me.

We sat outside in the late afternoon sun before church one evening, and I watched her feed her boy zucchini and potatoes. I watched him eat it while my toddler spit up anything I offered. She said, as everyone used to, "He's so tiny. How much does he weigh?" I felt the shame of failing at one more element of this new gig. I quietly resented her and wanted to be her at the same time.

Since then, my husband and I have added two more kids to our family, and I've realized I'm not the only mom who feels so inadequate. I see oceans of insecurity all around me. This is the one thing we're all terrified of getting wrong—how to be someone's mother. It makes us quick to point fingers at another mom, to keep score, because we need to neutralize our own feelings of failure. The shortest cut is to cut her down to size.



We are moms who are threatened by moms who work outside the home. We are moms who judge moms who work as stay-at-home parents in the home. We are moms who are annoyed by the mom who doesn't socialize with other moms but concentrates on her Smartphone at the park; or we assume that if her kid is difficult, then she must be a bad parent. We are the moms who have worked so hard to be defined by our degrees that we're offended by the moms who are content without degrees. Yet the women we're so offended by bear our name: Mom. And they, too, change diapers, set curfews and engage in the grueling art of saying "no." Our mommy measuring jealously finds its mark against other "perfect" moms and competitively compares their children's abilities against our own.

But what if we could see that? What if others' choices didn't offend mine? What if together we actually accepted Jesus' dare in John 15:12 to "love one another as I have loved you"?

What would that look like—to love other moms rather than whipping out measuring sticks and insecurities? Instead of judging with raised eyebrows, pursed lips and hands on hips, what if we focused on being the kind of neighbor everyone would want?

If we really treated others as Jesus did, living as Jesus instructed in Luke 10:37: "Go, and do likewise," maybe it would look something like this:

Stop comparing; start *encouraging*.

It's the strangest mother instinct—to instantly compare myself and my child to her and her child. Whether I'm standing in line at the bank and the mom ahead of me is holding hands with her child or I'm watching a room full of delicate, 3-year-old ballerinas twirl out of time to music, I am mentally measuring the superior mothering skills of other women, comparing my child to theirs.

We measure each other to see if we measure up. But what if that tug to compare was instead a trigger to encourage? What if we took the extra moment to deliberately find something to praise in that other mother sitting across from us at the playground? Authentically building up someone else is the first step to feeling better about ourselves and has the added benefit of helping us start to defuse some of our own insecurities by focusing on someone else's beauty and not our own inadequacies.

Remember our kids are always *watching*.

When I'm tired and the kids are demanding and I explode with, "I am not your servant," I shouldn't be surprised when a week later I hear an older brother respond to a younger brother's request for help in the same way.

We are walking, talking, living lessons for our kids. And what we love, they may end up loving. But what we judge, they will probably judge. Criticizing other mothers tells our kids it's OK for them to criticize their friends. Teaching our kids how to serve and how to love their neighbors as themselves, especially when their neighbors don't look, live or choose the same as they do, starts with how I treat those who don't live like me. My hope is that one day they will be comfortable in homes that look nothing like the one they grew up in, that they will be quick to love and slow to criticize, because they started practicing early.



Be *brave* enough to be "un-fine."

For a long time I hid my messes. I was afraid of them and afraid of what people would say. So I just walked around with this ache of insecurity and new-mom panic. I tried to ignore these feelings and was politely saying I was "fine" when anyone asked how I was doing—as if this could ease the doubt that was living in me as my 1-year-old went night after sleepless night convincing me I had no business being anyone's mom.

"Fine" is so dangerous. Fine means the end of a conversation and the beginning of nothing. If the "truth will set you free" (John 8:32), it's best to start living in it, even when it's hard to admit our un-fine moments. I've found it's in those moments that people can actually get to us to help us.

The day I admitted to a friend that I was anything but fine was the day I discovered the beginning of real friendship and the ability to start piecing my un-fine bits back together. No mom is exempt from the un-fine days. And rather than pretending they don't exist, if we are willing to share how we made it through, we'll help equip each other with the survival skills for managing the next bout of bad days. And we just might gain new friends who will bring over chocolate cake when we're in the thick of it.

Give the gift of going *first.*

Here's the thing—other mothers are desperate to know that they're not alone in their fear of failure, their sleeplessness, their worry that the baby isn't gaining weight, sleeping through the night yet or walking. But they are equally afraid of admitting that out loud.

If you're willing to fess up to your own fears, you open the door for others to be freed from the isolation of the awful lie that "I'm the only one who ever felt this way."

You give them a gift when you go first—the possibility of community and solidarity. You give them the gift of transparency and acceptance. You lift a load off their shoulders when you open up with your own stories of failure, like when your son told his kindergarten teacher about the time you lost your temper and told him to, "Shut up, already."

Years after I was a first-time mom; years after I'd said goodbye to my pre-mom jeans and adapted to a perpetual state of sleep deprivation; years after having my third baby—one night an email arrived in my inbox. It was from the mom I used to measure and re-measure and complain about.

The perfect mom with her perfect son and her perfect waistline—that I could never live up to—admitted that she'd once felt just as lost as I had. Her heart had been as lonely as mine in those first years of motherhood. Her story that felt miles away from mine sidled up to say that we'd been in it together all along. We just didn't know.

We were both so focused on the how-tos that we forgot the me-toos. We missed the freedom of admitting to our struggles and the relief of being able to say, "Me, too."

And just like that, the boundary line between us was erased. Or rather, she stepped over it, and it got scuffed up by our footprints, our messes, our very different choices—as we walked right into the middle of a shared story.

Moms being moms together.

Lisa-Jo Baker is a popular blogger and the author of *Surprised by Motherhood.*



12 SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS FOR MOMS

Busy days often force moms to do things quickly, including reading the Bible. But when that happens, women miss out on the insights gleaned from meditating on God's Word.

To help you avoid missing out on the refreshment God wants to give you, Liz Lassa has adapted her Spiritual Circle Journal into a format that helps moms who are struggling to set aside time with God. Each page can be completed over a two-day period, in the brief moments you have. Even when you're interrupted, the format allows you an easy return to where you left off.

The first three meditations affirm your unique role as a mother. When women are feeling overwhelmed by the demands of caring for their children, they often need reminders that mothering does matter—and that God can recharge them when they're weary. The next three meditations strive to encourage women to leave their isolated lives and share them with other women. This Christian fellowship is a healthy way to find support, Christian mentors and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The final six meditations help women acknowledge any security that is affected by the judgments of others or comparisons to others, before moving into what God has for them.



The *Spiritual Circle Journal* (SpiritualCircleJournal.com) is a quiet-time tool that can be used with your Bible and devotional books for a more meaningful prayer life. The format helps you order your thoughts and prayers, make connections and see how God might be leading you as you meditate on Scripture. Author, retreat leader, and Christian life-purpose coach Liz Lassa uses this devotional tool to help others.

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HERE'S HOW

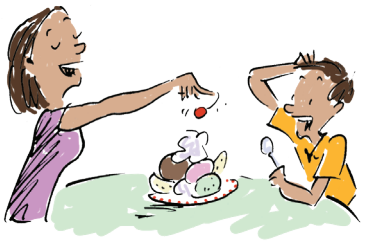
You can complete a page in one sitting, or start and come back to it, as you need. These three-per-week meditations are each set up in the same way.

Here is how to use them:

- Select a page.
- Read the Scripture verses.
- Read the devotional thought.
- Pray the prayer provided.
- Then digest what you've read through by answering nine questions, listed at the bottom of the page. You may start with any question and answer them in any order. Then when you're done, and if you want to go deeper, read the Bible passage surrounding the Scriptures that most resonated with you.

"May God bless you as you seek Him!"

— Liz Lassa, wife, mother, coach, speaker and creator of the Spiritual Circle Journal



Action: What might God want you to do? And for whom?

Lessons Learned: As you reflect on the last few days and your time with God, is there anything He might be trying to teach you?

Message: What is the main point God might want you to get from today's Scripture verse(s)?

Journal Entry: What struggles, cares or joys are on your heart today?

Confession: What sin(s) do you need to confess from a repentant heart?

Prayer: What do you need God's help with—for yourself or others?

Verse/Lyric: What in today's Scripture—or a song lyric or quote—is standing out to you?

God Moving: Where are you seeing God move in your life—big or small—that feels coincidental?

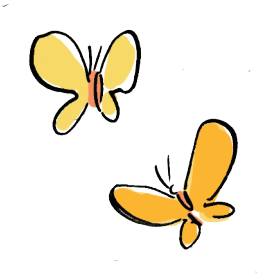
Thank You: What are a few things that you are most grateful for right now?

MOTHERING MATTERS

Readings

GALATIANS 6:9-10

9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.



PROVERBS 31:27-28

27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.

Ponder

Even when we believe our role as a loving mother is important, we may grow tired at times.

Prayer

Lord help me to remember the incomparable value of mothering well even when I grow weary. Give me a kind and gentle heart toward the precious children that You have given me.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

WHATEVERS

Reading

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

[12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ponder

The attitude in which we do our "whatevers" is important to God.



Prayer

I am sorry for the times I have griped and complained about the mundane tasks of motherhood. Help me to see these small "whatever" tasks as glorious offerings to You.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

WE MUST ASK

Readings

ISAIAH 58:11

And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

PSALM 121:1-3

[1] I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? [2] My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. [3] He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;

Ponder

Amid the demands of each day, we follow through best as mothers when we ask for and rely on God's strength, not our own.



Prayer

Lord, please guide me through each hour of each day. Fill me full of Your powerful Holy Spirit, a well that never runs dry.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

UN-FINE FRIENDSHIPS

Reading

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

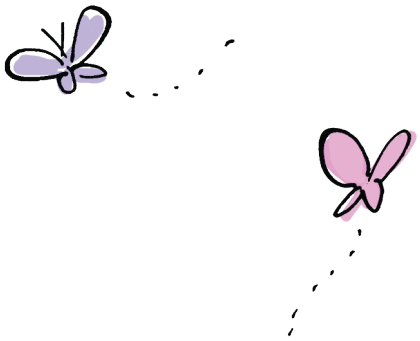
9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep
warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will
withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ponder

Developing friends that we can be "un-fine" with takes courage and vulnerability.

Prayer

Father God, please show me which friendships to invest in during this season, and help me notice people who need a friend so that I might reach out to them. I thank You for the gift of friendship and ask that You would help me model authenticity and vulnerability in all areas of my life.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

GOD PROVIDES WISE GUIDES

Readings

ACTS 8:31

And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

PROVERBS 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

JAMES 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Ponder

We can count on God to provide us with a customized spiritual growth plan through His Word, the Holy Spirit and those He puts in our life.

Prayer

Lord, please guide me each day on this journey of motherhood and provide wise friends and mentors to walk alongside me. Give me a teachable heart and mind that will grow in Your wisdom with each lesson I learn.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:



STIR EACH OTHER UP

Readings

HEBREWS 10:24-25

[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.



1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

HEBREWS 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Ponder

We can encourage other mothers to do good by our words and example.

Prayer

Dear God, please help me set a priority on getting together with other mothers as You carve out time for these friendships to grow. Then when we're together, show me how to encourage them and allow us to love each other and do good works.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

IDENTITY CRISIS

Readings

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

1 PETER 2:9



But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

EPHESIANS 4:24

... and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ponder

We are created in the likeness of God; we were not formed by our wounds and weaknesses.

Prayer

Lord, help me move beyond the false identity dictated by my wounds and weaknesses. Give me the ability to believe what Your Word says about who I am. Please release me from the chains of the past so I can live my life as a new creation in You.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

GUARD YOUR MIND

Readings

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.



PHILIPPIANS 4:8

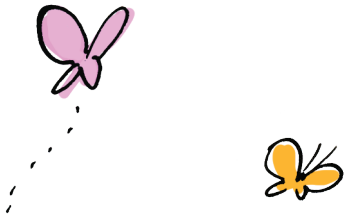
Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Ponder

Seeing ourselves as Christ sees us begins with our thought life.

Prayer

Dear God, as negative thoughts about myself, insecurities, judgments and comparisons creep into my mind, please release me from them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Open my eyes to how You see me so I know that my security lies in You.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

PRECIOUS TO GOD

Readings

DEUTERONOMY 7:7-8

7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples . . .*



ISAIAH 49:15-16

15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you . . .*

ISAIAH 43:4

Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

ROMANS 5:8

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ponder

Even while we were sinners, God set His affections on us for no other reason than the fact that He loves us.

Prayer

Father, when life is hard, You wrap Your arms around me and remind me that I am precious. Thank You for giving me a love that isn't based on my being perfect. Help me accept Your undeserved favor and show me how to treat others as You have treated me.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

*Continue reading from your Bible.

MERCIES AFRESH

Readings:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:8–10

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me . . .*

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23

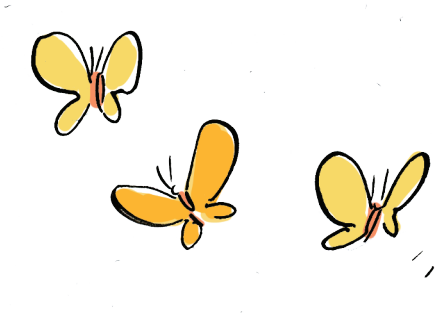
22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Ponder

When we take our weakness and daily failures to God and ask for His power to overcome them, we are taking the first step toward transformation.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that I will bring my daily failures to You. Please transform them and me in Your timing and for Your glory. Direct my words and actions. Show me what You would do. And then help me follow Your will.



Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

*Continue reading from your Bible.

YOU COMPLETE ME

Readings



PROVERBS 19:22

What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar.

EPHESIANS 3:16-19

16 … that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being . . .*

ACTS 17:24-28

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man . . .*

PSALM 143:8

Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Ponder

When "steadfast love" or "unfailing love" is mentioned in the Bible, it is usually attributed to God, not people. God needs nothing from us, so His love for us is unconditional.

Prayer

Please help me grasp the depth of Your unfailing love so I am completed by You. Then root me in Your love so I may learn to love my children and husband unconditionally.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You:

*Continue reading from your Bible.

GOD AS VALIDATOR

Readings

GALATIANS 1:10

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

ROMANS 8:31

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?



COLOSSIANS 1:10

So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Ponder

When you accept your validation from God alone, you will feel valued and valuable.

Prayer

Lord, I don't want to miss Your plans and purposes by trying to gain the approval and validation of others. Show me where I am seeking validation wrongly. Please guide my decisions, that I might please You.

Action:

Lessons Learned:

Message:

Journal Entry:

Confession:

Prayer:

Verse/Lyric:

God Moving:

Thank You: