

"FILLED WITH GRACE, HOPE, AND PRACTICAL WAYS FORWARD FOR EVERY MOMMA."

CANDACE CAMERON BURE, ACTRESS AND *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR



GRUMPY

Say goodbye to

MOM

stressed, tired, and anxious,

TAKES A

and say hello to

HOLIDAY

renewed joy in motherhood

VALERIE WOERNER

FOREWORD BY JENNIFER DUKES LEE

PRAISE FOR *GRUMPY MOM TAKES A HOLIDAY*

Filled with grace, hope, and practical ways forward for every momma, *Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday* is a necessary read for anyone struggling to find refreshment and abundance in the everyday moments of motherhood. Discover how to take a holiday from being Grumpy Mom and turn to God's truth about who you are.

CANDACE CAMERON BURE

Actress and *New York Times* bestselling author

Val has been discipling women, moms, and our generation with her words and her products for years—and this book just continues that good work. She uses the same gifts of vulnerability and honest truth to serve us—her readers—and she'll leave you encouraged and spurred on to embrace joy right where you're at.

JESS CONNOLLY

Speaker; coauthor of *Wild and Free* and *Always Enough*,
Never Too Much; author of *Dance Stand Run*

In a world that often coddles us in our #hotmessmom comfort, *Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday* looks at joy in motherhood exactly how the Bible does: joy isn't a feeling; it's a choice. And the results of choosing joy extend far beyond merely living a happier life. As you travel through these chapters with your new friend Val, you'll definitely laugh. You'll probably cry. But most of all, you'll gain a godly determination to be the mom today you want your kids to remember tomorrow.

MICHELLE MYERS

Founder of she works HIS way and author of *Famous in Heaven and at Home*

Okay, fellow Grumpy Mom, Valerie does not shy away from the reality of yucky inner thoughts and motivations. On these pages, you will find a friend who understands the challenges of parenting little ones while living out your God-appointed ministries. She graciously invites you send “the grumps” packing and embrace a better, joy-filled way.

HEATHER MACFADYEN

Host of the *Don't Mom Alone* podcast

I am not a momma, but I *am* an advocate of community and the hope that can flourish within it. And if I have learned anything from my momma friends, it's that you can't do this thing alone, yet daily you find yourself feeling just that way at one time or another—alone. Valerie has a way of being able to see you in the trenches, grab your hand out of compassion, and gently pull you up with the truth “he's got this, he's got you, and he's got them.” A community of mommas will gather around these pages and see hope flourish.

JENN JETT

Freedom fighter and dream defender; founder of The Well Studio and Camp Well

Yes, yes, yes! Can we please have more books like this? As a mom of three little girls ages three and under, I am determined to not be “that” mom—the one who is grumpy and always complaining about the little blessings I begged for. Instead, I choose joy. I choose to join Valerie on this vacation—a forever vacation—of finding the indescribable joy in motherhood. Thank you, Valerie, for making me laugh and cry, and most of all for reminding me of this high calling of motherhood and what a *joy* it can be if I decide not to be Grumpy Mom.

DR. ALY TAYLOR

Author, speaker, and reality star of TLC's *Rattled*

If you're a mom who has ever struggled with getting grumpy with your kids (quite possibly all of us!), then you're going to be encouraged and inspired by Valerie Woerner in *Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday*. While she can relate to the very real challenges of motherhood, she also offers hope and action steps to help you find peace and joy in your amazing role as a mom.

LISA JACOBSON
Club31Women.com

After reading this book, you will be encouraged and empowered and feel a little less alone. This book will help replace the lies you might believe about yourself as a mom and offer a redemptive and refreshing perspective on motherhood. This book has held a mirror to my most vulnerable moments as a new mom and challenged me to turn my grumblings into gratitude. The truth-bomb reminders in the book will transform how you teach, care for, and respond to your children. As you read, you will be filled up with more grace, joy, and love for yourself and your littles.

AUDREY ROLOFF
Coauthor of *A Love Letter Life*, founder of Always More, and
cofounder of Beating50Percent

In a culture that offers us a bazillion reasons to blame our kids for our stress and exhaustion, *Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday* challenges readers to reconsider the blessing of motherhood. Val gently leads us to face this truth: we're not victims of our motherhood—we're victors as we surrender to God's Spirit. Pick up this book and rediscover the joy of being the mom God created you to be.

ASHERITAH CIUCIU
Founder of One Thing Alone Ministries and author of *Full: Food, Jesus, and the Battle for Satisfaction*

As moms living in a digital age with endless demands on our time, we need the hopeful message Val offers in *Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday*. The “holiday” Val describes isn’t the normal getaway we often desire. Instead, she offers us a better way of living and embracing our roles in motherhood by learning the gift of contentment right where God has placed us. Val’s honesty will have you nodding your head as if you are sharing with a close friend over a cup of coffee. For every tired and overworked mom out there, this book will send you on your way with hope in your heart and joy in your step.

GRETCHEN SAFFLES

Writer and founder of Well-Watered Women

Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday left me cheering out loud and filled with new peace with every turn of the page! This refreshing and actionable book delivers on its promise and more: I have found new joy in motherhood and in my faith, thanks to Val’s insightful words. I couldn’t put this book down!

LARA CASEY

Author of *Make It Happen* and *Cultivate*



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VALERIE WOERNER



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Grumpy Mom Takes a Holiday: Say Goodbye to Stressed, Tired, and Anxious, and Say Hello to Renewed Joy in Motherhood

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FOREWORD

THE FIRST CONVERSATION I had with Val happened over Voxer. If you've never heard of Voxer, it's basically a walkie-talkie app on your phone. I feel like Voxer is proof that Jesus loves moms. When you're having trouble adulting as a mom, you can escape to your bathroom, lock the door, and open up your Voxer app to talk to other moms who are hiding in *their* bathrooms.

I don't remember what my issue was the day Val reached out to me. I *do* remember how she started her message to me: "Jennifer, let me pray for you." And then she did just that. She prayed the most beautiful prayer. Her words gave me the peace and perspective I needed.

I tell you this because you need to know that Val is an intensely trustworthy guide, with the words you need to hear in this season of your life. Her heart beats like this: *Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus*.

But this isn't some impossibly pious book by some impossibly pious woman. Yeah, she's the kind of friend who will pray for you. She's also the woman who will laugh at your jokes. She's the next-door neighbor you wish you had. Val is the kind of woman who would share her last piece of chocolate with you. (Well, I *thought* she would share her chocolate, but then I

read chapter 6, “When They Cry, I Eat Chocolate.” So the jury is still out on that one.)

Val is *definitely* the kind of woman who, if she came to your house today, wouldn’t bat an eye at the Lego city that is experiencing urban sprawl on your living room floor. She wouldn’t care that there’s an Everest-sized mountain of laundry on your dining room table. And she would affirm your insistent belief that ketchup counts as a vegetable.

Val is the friend you will absolutely listen to, because she will get super honest with you first. That’s my favorite kind of friend, and that’s my favorite kind of writer. I don’t have much tolerance for books written by people who are unwilling to disclose their own struggles while doling out advice like one of those annoying guys at shopping mall kiosks who have “just the product for you.” Nope. Dot. Com.

What you’ll get here is full transparency. You’ll get to meet Grumpy Mom Val. And maybe that’s how you will get honest enough to find your own Grumpy Mom Self. The thing is, we’ve got to drag Grumpy Mom out from behind the locked bathroom door and into the light before we can send her on an extended vacation to Siberia.

So yeah, Val might step on your toes a little bit while you’re reading this book, but you’ll survive. As I say to my own children: “But are you bleeding?”

Here’s what else Val will do: she’ll make you laugh when she reminds you that sometimes motherhood feels like all the shots are being called by the tiny dictators in your life. She’ll make you sigh with relief when you realize you’re not alone.

And get this—she’ll actually help you send Grumpy Mom packing. Val doesn’t just say a lot of nice words about some things. She gives doable action steps that even the busiest mom can handle.

And in the end, you'll feel confident that you can leave a lasting legacy of love for the littles in your home. That's what almost every mom I know worries about: the legacy we're leaving. We all harbor secret concerns that our kids will remember us as Grumpy Mom-zillas.

As Val gently reminds us, "The legacy we leave starts *inside* of us." And then she tells us that because of Jesus' love for us and for our kids, a lasting legacy is possible. That's exactly what I need to know as a mom: that Jesus loves this hot mess and that he will help me through this.

Just this morning, Val's message echoed in my heart when I was on the verge of losing my cool with one of my teenage daughters. She had overslept and was running late, and I was afraid we wouldn't get to the bus stop in time. I was about to snap, but then I took a deep breath and offered grace instead of harsh words. Turns out, she didn't miss the bus after all. In that moment, I was so relieved that I listened to Val's voice in my head and found my chill instead of blowing a gasket over the teenage equivalent of spilled milk.

Moms, let me tell you one more thing. You will love this whole book, but one of my very favorite parts comes at the end, so don't stop reading until you get there. Promise?

I read the final pages through tears as Val reminded me that we moms don't have to wait until nap time to find joy.

We don't have to wait until the kids are all grown up and gone to fulfill our callings.

We can have fulfillment right here, right now.

That's what awaits you—the kind of peace, joy, and fulfillment that you can find out in the light—on the other side of the bathroom door.

Jennifer Dukes Lee,
author of *It's All Under Control*
and *The Happiness Dare*

INTRODUCTION

I HAD VALID REASONS TO BE GRUMPY. Or so I told myself. The past several weeks had been pushing all my mom buttons: my workload was overwhelming; my younger daughter, Vana, was teething; my older daughter, Vivi, was constantly whining; and my husband, Tyler, kept coming home late from work. On top of all that, the Louisiana summer made it too hot to function outside. The world had handed me my scepter and crown and made me Lady Grumpy Mom over all Woerner land and beyond.

My days consisted of walking around on pins and needles waiting for (and dreading) the moment one of my two bundles of joy would burst into tears or whines. When the house was quiet—if they were giggling together or playing quietly in their separate corners—instead of enjoying the moment of peace, I braced myself to release Grumpy Mom as soon as I got orders to pounce. It was as if I thought any bump in life demanded her presence. And motherhood will certainly give you plenty of bumps to test that theory if you let it.

So there I was, floundering through the witching hour and waiting at the door like a puppy dog for my husband to come home—not because I longed to enjoy his company, but because

I wanted to tap out and escape the circumstances I was convinced were stealing my joy.

We've all been there as moms, haven't we? We know, deep down, that our children are gifts and that we have so much to be grateful for. But discontentment sneaks into our hearts anyway, and we find ourselves huddled in the bathroom or in the closet, sulking about how hard it is to parent day in and day out. When we finally emerge, our kids know to stay out of Mom's way for a while. And if they don't? That's our cue to start yelling. Many times these aren't full-blown fits, just tense words with an underlying aggressive tone. In our hearts, we are longing for some sort of escape, preferably involving sunglasses, sand, and the sound of ocean waves.

Maybe you even feel a little guilty or ashamed for picking up this book in the first place—after all, you want to be marked by joy, and you long to be one of those moms who takes everything in stride. But the truth is, motherhood at any stage isn't easy. If Grumpy Mom lives at your house sometimes, you're in good company.

But the purpose of this book isn't just to commiserate over the hard stuff; the point is to discover together a better way. We don't have to resort to Grumpy Mom status, even when life gets busy or our kids misbehave or life doesn't go the way we hope it will. I think we know this to be true, but in our bustling homes, it's easy to neglect the quiet whisper reminding us that the Holy Spirit is at work within us and that we have the power to choose joy no matter what's happening around us.

The trigger for me that something needed to change in my perspective came on an otherwise ordinary day when I was tucking my then-three-year-old into bed. As I curled up beside her in her toddler bed under the fluffiest fleece flamingo blanket, I was

feeling particularly grateful for her. And on that day, I actually thought to pass that information along.

“You make me smile so much, Vivi!” I said.

You should have seen the way she beamed. Her grin immediately spread wider than I had ever seen it. She said, “That makes me so happy to hear, momma!”

I reveled in the moment with her and treasured her cute little profile as she looked up at the ceiling and sang made-up songs for me. Then I kissed her good night and scurried off to tell my husband all about it. I loved that my joy could make her happy too.

But as I reveled in that special moment, I began to wonder why it had made such an impact on her. Was it really so earth shattering for her to see me smile? Why was she so surprised that she’d made me happy? Didn’t that sentiment come across every day?

As I reflected on this scene, I finally made this admission to myself: *There’s a slight chance I’ve been grumpier than I thought.* But where did Grumpy Mom come from? What stole my smiles without my knowledge? And why did I struggle endlessly to simply enjoy my life?

I couldn’t let this go. And that meant it was time to do some digging, studying, praying, and introspective thinking. You know, just a fun Saturday night for a nerd like me. Over the following weeks, I came to what has been a life-changing realization: I didn’t have to escape my life as a mom when things got chaotic to experience joy. It was time for me to stop playing the victim and take some ownership. I didn’t need to take a holiday from my mom life; I needed to take a holiday from being Grumpy Mom. Of course, I would have preferred to banish her to some island for life, like Napoleon. But I knew that I wouldn’t be able to get rid of Grumpy Mom permanently. This

was a decision I'd have to make over and over again. And lucky for us, it doesn't take a permanent banishment of Grumpy Mom for us to experience radically refreshed motherhood.

Armed with a renewed fire in my belly to pursue the abundant life Jesus calls us to, I cranked up a worship playlist, diffused an essential oil (aptly named Joy), and threw back the curtains to let in that early morning (and I mean earrrrly morning) sunshine. As I did, I connected more dots: *joy is something we have to fight for*.

The tricky thing about our struggle is that it's not always obvious we're in a battle. We have an enemy who is cunning—he knows he doesn't have to make us awful; he can just flash some shiny objects in front of us to keep us distracted from God's big plan. When I think about the way the world sees motherhood, I start recognizing the shiny distractions.

The world's sentiments about motherhood may seem innocent at first glance:

1. Moms can't function without coffee.
2. A trip to Target with the kids rivals a day in prison.
3. Is it wine-thirty yet?
4. The only way moms can get a break is to hide out in the bathroom.
5. If you have a white couch, your child is bound to destroy it.

If you are reading this book, I'm guessing you have fallen for some of the world's lies about motherhood at some point. We've heard it all. Moms are tired. Moms are emotional. Moms are control freaks. Moms are terrible friends. The worst part is that we allow these things to become the dominant voice determining our thoughts and actions. But this doesn't have

to be the end of our story. Romans 12:2 is about to become the anthem for anyone who wants to send Grumpy Mom on a holiday: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (NIV). I love how *The Message* words this verse: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.” *Without even thinking.* That’s exactly the danger—that we accept the world’s subpar clichéd version of motherhood without even realizing we could be living something better. It becomes second nature for us to stay in the pigeonhole the world puts us in. We think we have no choice but to live up to the stereotype of moms as worriers and hot messes.

The life we live is often far below what God has graciously gifted to us, and it should come as no surprise that *this* is when Grumpy Mom sneaks in. We spend our days focusing on the things of this world and end up living an insane life when the Lord has offered us abundance and soundness of mind. We have bought into an idea of “normal motherhood,” which when you really think about it, is completely not normal.

- Do you feel totally overwhelmed when falling into bed?
- Are you consumed with worries about the future?
- Does your child’s tantrum ruin the rest of your day?
- Are you preoccupied with schedules and to-do lists?
- Are you infinitely stressed about how you will get it all done?

If this is what motherhood is most days, then we are in need of a change. We need that transformed life Romans talks about. And I for one am ready to fight for it.

YOUR ESCAPE FROM GRUMPY-LAND

I wrote this book not because I have this all figured out, but out of my own experiences as a grumpy mom. I still have those explosive moments when I slam doors, discipline my kids apart from Jesus, throw myself a pity party, and eat the weight of my feelings in fancy chocolate.

I'm in the thick of motherhood right now. As my husband, Tyler, and I raise our two girls—Vivi, four, and Vana, two—I have plenty of chances to become Grumpy Mom. My naturally melancholy personality latches on to any reason to be unhappy with my life, no matter how great it actually is. But somehow the Lord is in the process of grabbing hold of my weary heart and helping me to latch on to hope instead. This hope is available to all of us—hope that we don't have to stay stuck in Grumpy-land, with no possibility of change, because God invites us to trade in the world's definition of motherhood for his truth. That simple truth has life-changing implications.

In the chapters ahead, we will combat the lies we moms tend to believe and look at ways to renew our minds. You'll find twenty misconceptions about motherhood, divided into five hope-filled sections: surrender, replenish, develop, connect, and thrive. We'll start with surrendering a few specific misconceptions that we tend to hold on to tighter than my youngest daughter holds on to her paci. Next, we'll learn where we can go to fuel up for the journey ahead. Then we'll develop a few key spiritual muscles, which will enable real transformation to happen. After that, we'll look at how a change in our perspectives can revolutionize our relationships. Lastly, we'll look at ways we can go beyond simply getting rid of grumpy and move toward thriving instead.

You can read through the book as a whole, or you can jump

to the areas that are obvious triggers for Grumpy Mom to visit your house.

My promise to you is that as you start replacing what the world tells us about motherhood with what God says, it will change your disposition and your view of motherhood.

The temptations to lose hope and become discouraged will still come up (there's no changing that!), but you'll be equipped to send Grumpy Mom packing before she gets too comfortable taking up residence in your heart. You'll be able to choose a more hopeful approach, which means more joy and more energy in motherhood. We can experience something far better than what this world has to offer. We can show patience and grace to our kids in a way that points them to Jesus. We can feel delight as God uses and refines us. And maybe we can eat just enough chocolate to feel pure enjoyment over life's little pleasures instead of enough to get a bellyful of regret.

Here's my mission for all the discouraged and weary moms: to ensure that our kids will remember us as mommas with smiles on our faces—not because we're fake or phony, but because we're being continuously renewed by truth. They'll see us as moms who have all the same issues and rough days as everyone else but who take our thoughts captive, lay them at the feet of Jesus, and exchange them for his truth. Then those thoughts can unleash the good life, which isn't just on some distant beach but is right here in front of us.

Momma, I hope this book will refresh your soul like a much-needed vacation, even if in reality you are reading this from a dimly lit closet, hiding from your kids.



SPRING 2019



PART ONE

SURRENDER

Chapter 1

EMOJI OVERLOAD

Say Hello to Steady Emotions

A FEW SUMMERS AGO, my family and I found ourselves bunked up at my sister's house for several days during a flood that destroyed a good chunk of South Louisiana. On the third day of being cooped up with a toddler with no toys and a three-month-old with only a few diapers left, we started getting news that the waters were rising. So was my blood pressure. Being the intro-est introvert you will ever meet, I was going crazy not having my usual moments of the day to myself.

I don't remember what put the wheels in motion, but my husband said something, and I went ballistic. I could not be calmed down. And the more my husband and then my sister tried to calm me down, the more I insisted that I was being totally calm and rational.

In hindsight?

I. Was. Not.

So Tyler and I hashed it out awkwardly in the driveway in front of some storm do-gooders who had decided to pick up trash about three feet from our heated conversation. Eventually this truth came out: my husband thought I was very up and down. One minute I was sharing some sage advice, telling women on Instagram how I find peace or joy, and the next minute I was flipping out. What I *heard* my husband say was that he thought I was a phony. Cue more tears.

The rest of that week (after the waters receded enough for us to get home without needing a lifeboat), I thought a lot about this conversation. I hated that I could be so Spirit filled one minute and so rage filled the next. Every moment God was at work in me felt incredibly real. But there was no question about it, those sweet moments were often all too short.

At the time, I *happened* (that's Southern Baptist for "God orchestrated") to be reading *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero. As I learned just how important it is to care for our emotions as part of our spiritual health, it struck me for the first time how little attention I gave to my emotional health. Sure, I had Bible reading and prayer in my holy rotation of daily activities, but tending to my emotional health? What for?

Scazzero says, "We know we have found our balance when we are so deeply rooted in God that our activity is marked by the peaceful, joyful, rich quality of our contemplation."¹ The rich quality of our contemplation? You are chuckling, right? Who has time for that?

What I've learned from a few decades of "lessons," we'll call them, is that we're more willing to work on problem areas when things get bad enough. Maybe right now you are feeling desperate and drained of every possible tear. Your

voice is hoarse from yelling (I've been there), and your body is brittle (I've been there, too). If that's where you find yourself, I don't have to convince you that rich contemplation is worth it. You're all in. But if you don't think emotions affect your life that much right now, you might be tempted to skip this chapter, thinking you have bigger fish to fry. But no matter where you are on the emotional spectrum, this is a good place for all of us to start.

If we are going to tackle our inner Grumpy Mom to the floor, we have to start by first addressing the assumption that all moms are overly emotional. Swarming around us is the idea that women and, even more so, moms are just an utter mess of feelings. We're ticking time bombs, and our kids have to do dance moves around the activation switch. These thoughts are enough to make even a pretty stable momma feel on edge.

There's nothing wrong with emotions—in fact, the ability to feel is a gift from God. But the world would lead us to believe that instead of having control over our emotions, we are ruled by them. At times I have felt utterly unstable emotionally, and I think this cultural misconception is what planted the idea in the first place. Somehow I crossed over from feeling a little scattered and stressed to one tantrum (my girls', not mine) away from an all-out breakdown.

When we found out our second child was going to be a girl, one of my first reactions was to feel bad for my husband. Not because he'd miss out on all the father-son things, but because our house would be wall-to-wall tears or giggles, always cranked to an eleven in either direction. I wasn't sure he could handle the emotions of three females.

This breaks my heart a little. The assumption that girls can't process their emotions in a healthy way is all around us,

and it's wreaking havoc on us and our daughters. But here's some hope for us: we *can* process emotions in a healthy way. We aren't limited to the world's labels, because our God is not limited by anything.

So embrace your heart, fragile as it may be, and let's talk about a better mind-set when it comes to processing our emotions.

GET ME OFF THIS THING

Emotions were on my mind so much during my second pregnancy. Everywhere I turned, the topic seemed to come up—in webinars, in books, and in sermons. Then, three weeks before I gave birth to Vana, my sister got married, and less than twelve hours after I cried myself down the aisle as matron of honor, my cousin passed away unexpectedly and I bawled again, this time on my parents' porch. The range of emotions I experienced in the weeks prior to and after Vana's birth sent me on a roller coaster and all but consumed me. Pregnancy was the ultimate honesty filter. There was no possible way to suppress what I was feeling as I had attempted to do in the past. (I can say from experience that either extreme—stuffing the emotions or letting them fly all over the place—can be equally as dangerous.) It was during this time that I learned the driving power of emotions—and how clueless I was in dealing with them.

One of the biggest realizations that came to me from the sermons and books I read (okay, mostly the movie *Inside Out*) is that emotions are actually good indicators that we should take a deeper look inward. But we should manage them instead of letting them dictate our lives.

Does life sometimes feel like a roller coaster? Do you wake

up wondering if it's going to be a good day or a bad day based on whether your baby misses his nap or your toddler has a bad day herself? It's exhausting, isn't it? Living this way is the definition of survival mode. We hold on for dear life and let our emotions buck us around like a wild stallion. If you have never had a season where your emotions called the shots in your life, I tip my hat to you, ma'am. For the rest of us, this is totally normal, and dare I say, everyday life.

If you're ready to hop off the stallion, would you take a moment to picture another reality with me? Before your feet hit the floor in the morning, you lie in bed, look up at the ceiling, and praise Jesus for a new day. You tell him that you are excited to see what he has planned and that you are choosing right now to obey his lead instead of the leading of your emotions. Your heart isn't racing as you walk toward the dark abyss of a day full of unknowns. You know exactly what's to come—not the actual circumstances, but who you will be in the midst of them. Sure, one of your kids may barge into your room screaming for breakfast, but you hold out your hand and notice something new. It's steady like a Marine. Although you still can't predict what your kids will do, your heart is no longer set to the temperature of your circumstances. It's set to God's truth: that he is with you always, that he loves you, that his plan is better than anything you could come up with on your own. These truths trump anything the world will throw your way today, and as a result, you're calm and at peace.

We don't have to be slaves to the version of motherhood we see in all the movies: the mom who has stress in her life (shocker!) and then unleashes a storm of emotions on her kids, her spouse, and anyone else within earshot. This depiction of motherhood isn't just a fictionalized Hollywood version either.

We've seen it at Target, too—the mom who has stress in her life (in the form of a toddler) and starts yelling and slapping her kid and telling them to be quiet and stop hitting. We have bought into the lie that this is normal. Yes, tantrums in Target are normal. (And by this I mean that tantrums in Target are normal . . . for kids.) But we can flip the script when it comes to the way we respond.

CRYING OVER SPILLED MILK

Have you ever been scared of your kids? Not scared *for* them, but scared that they'll dictate how your day will turn out? I've been there, and it's utterly exhausting. And isn't this part of the reason we get so frustrated with them sometimes—because they have single-handedly chosen to destroy our day? We put undue pressure on our kids to keep us happy (or at least to behave well so we can pretend to be happy). But this expectation is misaligned. The truth is, if we are living by emotions that are based on circumstances, we will inevitably be disappointed.

If we didn't put so much pressure on our children to accomplish what they were never intended to, I think we'd enjoy them a lot more. We'd see that accidentally spilled glass of milk as a quick cleanup job rather than as something to snap a photo of, post on social media, and rant about how all of life with kids is messy. In that moment, we have a choice: we can take the situation in stride, or we can make the dangerous jump to the thought that life isn't what we hoped it would be. Cue depression. Then our kid says something that normally wouldn't be a big deal, but we're already spinning out of control. Cue anger. And then we see our kid's face and realize we

messed up. Cue sadness and guilt. And finally, cue wanting to throw in the towel.

In these moments, we need to hold on to the truth of Romans 8:6: “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (NASB). We will never find life or peace if our minds are consumed with every fleeting emotion that vies for space there.

Maybe you’ve already tried this whole setting your mind on the Spirit thing and it just didn’t take. Elisabeth Elliot emphasizes why it’s hard to capture thoughts: “The taking of captives is not a gentle business. They don’t want to come.”² In other words, we have to expect a fight as we change our thought patterns. We need to show up dressed for battle, not with our yoga pants around our ankles.

Here are two specific ways we can be proactive about allowing the Lord to change our thoughts.

1. We need to make room to really contemplate.

Even when we attempt to bring our minds to truth, we often cut things short before truth takes root. When we start sensing that our emotions are taking over, we might throw up a surface prayer like “God, please help me! I’m so frustrated!” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve done this, and when I got to “amen,” I felt nothing. Now, this isn’t a bad prayer. God hears our cries—even the ones tossed up in quick desperation. But we also need to set aside intentional time to give our brains space to think. For me, thinking is a lost art. I love to read, to consume, to produce. But as I’ve begun to take time to process what I’m learning, it has activated more change in me than simply reading all the materials I thought would bring transformation. I know this might sound

impossible in your noisy home, but in some ways it requires less energy than many other things we try in an attempt to find freedom.

So the next time you find yourself hiding in the bathroom trying to regroup, remember that because of the power God has given you, you are capable of resisting the downward spiral. You don't have to sulk in a Grumpy Mom happy hour; you can acknowledge the emotion without letting it determine your response. This might mean taking a second to think about why something stirred up so much anger in you. In this way, our emotions can alert us to an issue instead of dictating our actions. When we do this, our emotions actually serve us instead of the other way around.

2. We need to acknowledge that deeply ingrained thought patterns will take time to change.

Habits are formed when we repeat something over and over again. We learn this principle when we want to develop a good habit, but it works in reverse, too. It will take some time to remove our negative thought patterns, since they were likely formed over a long period of time. So take heart—even if the progress is slow, it doesn't mean you aren't being transformed. It may just take longer to rewrite your thought patterns than you expected. When you fall back into old habits, don't buy into the lie that you'll never change. Remember that this is all part of the process.

Sure, we'll all get upset again at some point. But let's say goodbye to the hour-long (or day-long!) visits from Grumpy Mom. Let's choose a steadfast spirit that is overflowing with truth so that life's hiccups don't knock us off kilter. It's possible to have victory over our thoughts, but only if we set our minds on the one who never changes.

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Recognize patterns.** Are there certain places, times of day, or circumstances that tend to trip you up? Recognize them and suit up for them. I love this version of Psalm 27:3: “When besieged, I’m calm as a baby. When all hell breaks loose, I’m collected and cool” (MSG). Let’s tuck this away and bring it to mind during the craziest parts of our days.
- 2. Create a list of grounding affirmations.** Don’t worry, there isn’t anything woo-woo about this. I’m just talking about starting the day with Scripture to lay a firm foundation. Write down a verse and put it on the bathroom mirror, or put it on your phone. You might even voice-record it so you can listen as you get dressed in the morning. Even if you don’t have time for a deep dive into Scripture, fill your morning tank with a few solid truths that will set your feet on a steady path.
- 3. Excavate the emotions.** Remember, emotions aren’t bad; they are purposeful and beautiful. The idea is not to become a robot who doesn’t feel things. So how do we experience emotions without letting them destroy our lives? The next time emotions well up that seem set on controlling you, ask yourself a few questions:
 - What is the emotion?
 - What does that emotion want you to do? If you let the emotion dictate your behavior, what would it have you do?
 - What is the truth you need to base your actions on?

KEY VERSE

The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.

ROMANS 8:6, NASB

PRAYER

Father, you created emotions. Just like any other good thing you have designed, they can be harmful if I allow them to be my master. Please make me aware of how I let my emotions rule me, and give me a steady heart that is calibrated to you. In Jesus' name, amen.