
finding joy

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Dear Mom
Letters

2013

| Rachel Martin |

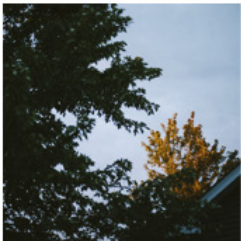


table of contents

dear am i enough mom.....	03
dear in a minute mom.....	06
dear mom during the holidays	08
dear mom no matter how you became a mom	10
<i>why dear mom letters</i>	12
dear mom of the little boy with celiac disease	13
dear mom on the hard days.....	15
dear mom this is why you matter.....	18
dear mom who feels discouraged.....	21
<i>my story</i>	24
dear mom who feels like she wants to quit.....	25
dear mom who likes everything perfect {and needs grace}.....	27
dear mom with the little one crying in the store	30
dear moms who feel stuck in a rut.....	34
<i>the future of finding joy</i>	37
dear moms who have said because i said so.....	38
dear moms with a messy house	40
dear moms with little babies	43
dear moms with littles	46
dear overwhelmed mom	48
dear overworked mom.....	5F
dear sweet mom who feels like she is failing.....	5I
dear tired mom	5İ
dear weary mom who needs a bit of encouragement	59
<i>topics for speaking engagements</i>	62

dear am i enough mom

Am I good enough?

Those four little words mull around in my brain throughout the day. I'll interact with others, write an email, read to the kids, cook dinner, fold laundry, mow the lawn, do a craft project, clean the living room for the third time, volunteer my time, bandage a skinned knee, clean the kitchen for the fourth time, will work very hard and at the end of the day will rest in my bed wondering if I measured up. If I'm mom enough, wife enough, homemaker enough, writer enough, friend enough.

Am I enough?



Just the other day, at Target, I found myself wandering through the store being told that I need this *or* that *or* I should color my hair like this *or* if I work really hard I'll have the perfect body *or* my kids need to eat only this *or* we need to have these summer fun outdoor toys *or* I simply must get new shoes for everyone *or* my kids aren't behaving as good as that mom who's got the cart full of healthy wonderful food. Then I wonder if I'm doing enough summer bridge learning activities *and then* I see the ice cream and next to it is the frozen yogurt making me feel guilty about the ice cream in the cart *and then* again, when I pay I see the simply living type magazines and realize that I am out of breath and feeling overwhelmed wondering if I am doing enough.

The store made me exhausted.

I listened to the non-stop chatter of society that constantly tells me, tells you, that I just need to do one more thing and then I'll be perfect. Perfect. Until the next one thing comes about and I need to start again and again and again.



Sometimes, I joke that I should have lived hundreds of years ago - when the needs were simply survival and food and family and survival again. It seems like it was more focused on important and less on all of these things that just exhaust us moms.

When did being a mom, and being intentional, and working hard get lost in the shuffle full of a world of new needs and exhausting expectations? When did the wants become the needs?

We do work hard. Yet, we're never really told we work hard. We've got Mother's Day, where everyone stops and goes *whoa mom you are amazing and you do a ton*, and then we're back to the every day cycle of more and more to do and more and more to manage. And yet, in it all, we're constantly being told that we don't really measure up and the only real way to measure up is to do more, spend more, volunteer more, and do more of more.



Ultimately? That stuff does not matter. What matters, my wondering if I am enough mom, is that you don't base your worth on this worldly ideal of things that we need to buy, to do, to work at, to lose, to gain, to be. Enough. Enough. Enough. **You are enough.**

It is okay if you choose to stay home during the summer and do no extra activities. It's okay that you have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches three days in a row. It's okay that your garden has weeds. It's okay that your kitchen counter has a pile of papers to file. It's okay that the throw pillows on the front porch aren't coordinated and switched to reflect summer. It's okay that sometimes you get behind in laundry. It's okay that you choose to say no to all the world says to say yes to. It's okay. You work hard, you keep trying, you keep doing, you keep being you, keep being mom.

Walk through Target with your head high. Even if the kids aren't perfect, and you don't have the greatest shoes, and your hair is in a pony tail, and you've got Fruit Roll-ups {did you know they're gluten free?} in the cart, and you're stressing a bit about money, and you're sipping a full calorie latte.

That's real.



We need more real in this world. It's the real that makes us better and stronger and more encouraging for others. It's the real that makes the extra moments, the trips, the decisions to do activities, the quiet moments at home matter more.

From me, the pony tailed wearing once out of breath wondering if I am enough mom to you, the totally worth it, totally enough, keep on trying, and totally amazing mom. Being a mom is enough. The stuff, the world's idea of am I enough doesn't matter. What matters? That you are the one there in the morning, the one with open arms for those kids, the one who picks up those papers on the counter and straightens the pile, that you keep plugging away at the laundry, and that half the garden has weeds, and sometimes you buy Fruit Roll Ups, and maybe the kids weren't perfect but were simply joyful to be in the store with you type of mom.

That is way more than enough.

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dear in a minute mom

I just told him *in a minute*.

It was this book, an old Arthur book from my older daughters, and he wanted me to read it to him. Caleb had asked twice already during the day and again last night right when I was making dinner. But, I was truly busy - I had ballet schedules to keep, dinner to make, a board meeting to attend, a review to write, and an email to respond to that was supposed to have been done yesterday.

In a minute, Caleb.

I kept moving. Finishing all I needed to do. The book? It just sat there on the old plaid couch next to the leaf pillow on a stack of books that were waiting to be read. It sat there till the next morning, this morning, when I sat down with a piping hot mug of coffee and my netbook and a quiet house with which to work. I looked over at the book, the well-worn and read book, and thought of that six year old sleeping upstairs waiting for the *in a minute* minute to come.

The minute never came yesterday.



I know you are busy. I get that frenzied and unending pace of things to do. We're constantly pushed to do more, create more, cook more, bake more, decorate more, teach more, organize more, garden more, host more, volunteer more, drive more, excel more, and ultimately to compare more. Us moms will see that massive to-do list, the never ending tasks, the schedule that is bursting without the empty days, the laundry spilling into the hallway, and the toys dumped out. No wonder we say *in a minute*.

For me it means stopping.

It means stepping off of the frenzied to-do list of today and sitting. It means hanging up the phone or closing the laptop and choosing to get down on their level, whatever level it may be, and looking them

in the eye and listening to the questions that so often get the quick *in a minute* answers. Not the kind of listen that my kids have dealt with, you know, the *mom, mom, mom, Mom* cry where they're trying to get the distracted me to pay attention and listen.

It's hard. Often being a mother feels like living in a gigantic game of catch up. You'll get everything just so, just perfect, and then well, then someone puts socks in the laundry hamper, or the milk spills, or the phone rings, or the timer on the oven buzzes. Real stuff. Keeping us busy. All the time.



Don't let life, don't let the crazy pace of life, the unending cycle of busy rob you from the minutes with your family. Don't let the books that they want to read stay on the couch for days until the day when that old Arthur book never leaves the shelf because the six year old has grown and lost interest in the story.

Just watch the *in a minutes*. Or the *just a seconds, waits, hold ons*, and more.

Does it mean never using those phrases? Absolutely not. I mean seriously, if you're changing a diaper and your four year old wants to go outside and the six year old is asking for paints and the eight year old wants to go on a bike ride there is no way you can do that right at that second. However, we can give an intentional, a really listening answer - *we can bike this afternoon, we will go outside after lunch, we can't do that today*. It's the real answer that matters {and sometimes it means saying no}. It's not about dropping everything all the time, although some of the time we simply do need to let our agenda go, instead it's about watching the answers so that the real importants don't get left sitting on a couch for days.

It's progress. Not perfection. My husband reminded my six year old of that yesterday and then reminded me of it as well. Now, today, I'm reminding you, the *in a minute* mom, to remember those words of truth. Just keep trying, just keep watching those *in a minutes* - it's the being aware and watching the answers and working to do those *in a minute* things matters.

You really are doing a great job. It's progress. Just pick up the book and read it now.

That's what I did.

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dear mom during the holidays

Let them see you smile.

Right now, in the midst of the busy, in the midst of this crazy time of the holidays when the everyday to-do list gets a steroid boost of stuff that has immediately become urgent, and the race through the everyday doesn't seem to slow down enough for you to even catch a breath - bless your family with a smile. Don't wish away the holidays or let the stress of the holidays rob you of joy.

Do you know how I know? Because just the other day as the kids were begging for me to take out the Christmas lights I remember thinking *I wish it was January 2.*

Yet, deep down, I don't.

I just don't like the *stressed out crazy racing expectation driven* feeling the often December leaves me with. And I am guessing some of you don't either. It's hard to step back, to celebrate Christmas and the holidays when one is running too hard, too fast, and not being able to enjoy the gift of memories found in these weeks.



Try to remember.

Right now, as you're sitting there reading these words, try to remember what it was like, on a great year, when you were a kid, when Christmas rolled around. I remember the days seemed to move slow - like the molasses we'd drizzle into the Moravian Gingerbread cookies - and that everything seemed just a bit more magical. I remember the lights, the reading of stories late at night with only the Christmas lights as illumination, and the never ending wonder and anticipation about those presents that once were carefully placed under the tree but always had a thorough evaluation by my siblings and myself. It magic.

That's what kids need. They need that bit of excitement, the anticipation, the joy, the wonder that can be tucked into December.

And yet, so often, you and I and the entire culture becomes so busy and stressed out like a coiled spring ready to snap. You have a choice. I have a choice. Embrace the culture of crazy or choose to be intentional during this upcoming month of December. I'm not saying the busy will go away - the busy - unless you decline every invite and shop at the weirdest hours possible it will inevitably be there. But, you can choose to not engage in adopting a stressed out attitude.



Your gift?

You can choose joy in the midst.
You can choose to celebrate the little things.
You can choose to create memories with your family.
You can choose to laugh.
You can choose to slow down just a bit.
You can choose to be happy even on those crazy days.
You can choose to not let stress dictate your mood.
You can choose to simply let the crazy busy still be good.

That's what I'm choosing to do. I'm choosing to bake cookies, to let there be *that* mess, to pull out the decorations, to string lights outside with numb fingers, to play the music, to draw names, to go to the parties, to simply celebrate the season. Even if I feel stress. The bottom line is this, I want my kids to remember me as the mom that smiled during the holidays - even though I'm sure I'll mess up many times - but yet, deep down, I want them to see me as the mom that embodied joy.

That's what I want for you. So dear mom during the holidays, let it, the stress, expectations, agenda, rushing, and more go. Just a bit.

Now, in these last days of November before the holiday crazy truly begins, embrace today.

And choose joy.

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dear mom no matter how you became a mom

We are all moms.

How we became moms doesn't define our motherhood. Some of us have adopted, fostered, delivered babies with meds, and some without, we've had C-sections and yet, that doesn't matter - we are all still at the core and heart - moms.

But, sometimes we struggle.

We may struggle thinking that *we wish we could have done it this way* or *should have done it that way*. Yet, sweet mom, it's truly not how we became moms that really matters - it is **what we do after** we become moms that ultimately matters.

After I had Caleb I felt defeated. His labor was long and hard and medical interventions had to take place - things that in my mind I never wanted to deal with - and then I came home with guilt. Like I wasn't strong enough, worthy enough, brave enough, if only *I had just tried* more. Those days spent home with my sweet boy were being tainted by this ideal of how he should have entered my arms. Until one day, my husband told me, *how he came to us doesn't matter - it's him right now, in your arms that matters*.



Nine weeks later my husband was diagnosed with cancer and those weeks spent feeling inadequate about Caleb's birth vanished. Now, I was simply grateful to hold this little boy, a boy full of life and hope, a boy who brought joy to the oncology radiation clinic with every visit, and I began to realize that the way he was born and entered our world didn't have any definition on my worth.

Moms. Listen to me. I know some of you are hurting right now because you are struggling with your own mom story. You're holding onto labels, hurts, ideals, and letting those ideas taint the gift of this moment.

Let it go.



What matters is today. Today when you pick that child up and tell them that you love them and you give of yourself making pbjs and wiping noses and reading stories and rocking newborns in chairs in the wee hours of the morning. It matters that you drive your eleven year old to their classes and wait in the car and pack them sweet notes. Being a mom matters more than how we became moms.

Sweet, sweet, sweet mom.

You matter. Today, embrace the child and the gift of being a mother. Embrace it. When they look at you - they see mom - they will never ever ever judge how they came into your life. Love them. Give of yourself. Pray for them. Embrace the ups and downs. Don't give up. But, ultimately, again, love them. Unconditionally.

Motherhood is a beautiful blessing.

Your children need **you**.

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why dear mom letters

These Dear Mom Letters are a reflection of a mother's heart.

I started to realize that if I'm struggling with feelings of discouragement, overwhelm, and failure as a mother, then the chances are that there are more moms out there who struggle as well. And so I began writing the letters. One of my first letters, Dear Moms with Littles, touched a chord with so many mothers that I realized this format would be a great way to reach mothers in a positive, encouraging, and motivating manner. Mothers around the world started chiming in about how they, too, felt alone, discouraged, or that they didn't matter. Deep down, we all just need the reminder about how much mothering and what mothers do truly matter.

So I continued writing them -- from worries about the littles crying in the store, to the frustrations of a messy house, from the moments of overwhelm, to the times when you want to quit. These simple letters have had a ripple effect on the lives of moms -- now we could all nod our heads, pull up our bootstraps, and tell each other to press on.

Motherhood is not meant to be journeyed alone. These simple letters, the reflections of my heart, have turned into a way for moms to support each other and to let others know that they are not alone. I'm still writing the letters. In fact, in my journal I currently have 28 letters waiting to be written. As I'm doing life, I'm recording moments, struggles, and joys and putting them into my Dear Mom letters. So many of my letters have been inspired by notes from you asking for specific letters or from comments in which you've shared your struggles and your motherhood dreams.

The bottom line of these letters? That motherhood, and that includes you, matters.

What Readers Are Saying ...

I love reading your "dear mom letters". Although my children are grown and most of your letters do not pertain (other than the tired mom, of which I am every day), they still warm my heart and bring a smile to my face. —Barbie

Thank you for reaffirming that it is OK to be a real, honest, imperfect person... especially as a mom. Your 'Dear Mom' letters have been bookmarked and I hope to reread them regularly to remind me about what really matters to me, to my family, to my children. My husband works overseas for a month at a time, and in that month he is gone, I have to do it all. No kidding, really everything...I have to do it all. There are days I just want to throw up my hands and say, "I QUIT!!", but I know that is not an option. It is on those days that I need your words. Thank you. —JV

dear mom of the little boy with celiac disease

I know you cried in the grocery store.

It was in the baking aisle, by the flour, with the big sale signs hanging on the shelves. You were standing there, looking at the flour, and then in your own cart. At the 16oz bag of almond flour that cost you \$12 and the sweet rice flour. Then you saw the shelves loaded with heavy bags of white unbleached wheat flour.

And you started to cry.

Not a big sob, but the kind of cry that can't be help. It's the cry that comes deep from within. Those tears of sadness filled your eyes as you glanced at the lady next to you freely loading her cart with five pound bags of flour. Gluten.

I know you were wondering if she saw you -- you and your cart with baking goods -- but clearly missing the white flour that was in all the carts around. You stared at her with your tear-filled eyes, wondering if she even thought about those bags of flour in her cart.

Did you ever think that last year was the last year, the last time baking with white flour? Did you appreciate that baking? Or, more than likely, you didn't even realize what a gift it was not having to think about food and gluten every single day. Did you even really know what gluten was? Or that you would hunt it out to make sure it never entered your Samuel's little body?

You're tired. You're a fighter.



But, you see, you need to cry.

Everyone knows you are strong, and that you'll do whatever for your boy, and that you want to find joy. But sometimes, especially right now, as you near the anniversary of your little boy's diagnosis, it is needed to mourn. Don't start rationalizing that it's *not that bad*, or it *could be worse*, or *we'll just get through*.

You'll never be able to put that white unbleached flour on sale for \$2.49 in your cart for your Samuel. Never.

And that's why you cried. Not because you are selfish, or thinking only of yourself, or all that -- you cried because you love your boy. Fiercely.

Crying doesn't make you weak, or make you not appreciate where you are, or that you're not grateful. Crying makes you real.

Celiac Disease wasn't welcomed in your home.

You didn't choose that for your Samuel. You wanted him to be able to eat the cookies with the white flour at Christmas. To be normal. Sometimes you mourn, and that's okay. But, you know, I've seen you fight as well. There's a tension in life, a balance, and living in that place can bring joy. Don't hide.

He's worth those fighting tears.

You'll make new traditions, new cookies, and you *will* find joy.



You hear me? You will, and I promise, you will find normal. And joy.

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dear mom on the hard days

To you the out of breath mom who wants to throw in the towel on a hard day.

It's that day that goes off track at 9:04 am and you want to throw your arms in the air and grab the Ben and Jerry's from the fridge and turn on TLC and watch A Baby Story marathon and you're wishing that it was tomorrow and you don't know how to finish and the kids are fussing and you're totally behind and really you're out of breath.

Stop.

Just stop. For a moment. Just for a minute and listen.



I know it's hard. I know about the spills, the relationships, the laundry left too long in the washer, the peanut butter smushed on the floor, the morning where there really is nothing for breakfast, and there's no coffee, and the kids are fighting, and toys are dumped, books torn, the yard is full of toys, and you're wondering if the weather is making all the kids crabby at the same time, and all of yesterday's dishes are sitting on the table, and you'd just like a shower, and you're late, and and and... Well, that makes it really hard to start and to find courage and patience and that *pull up your bootstraps* energy..

In fact, often, it feels impossible.

It's this battle in wondering if it really matters what you do. You're doing it day in and day out and you're still feeling behind and racing to try to catch up to this undefined bar of normal. Remember back before they were born? And how you dreamed about crafts on the table - you never imagined the spilled glue and glitter and paint on the face and that they didn't really care about doing that fabulous fall pumpkin craft where you glue on wiggly eyes - or the perfect day with nutritious and organic breakfasts or the Pottery Barn inspired family room with cute baskets and chalk write on labels or the mornings with a quick check off routine and laminated charts with adorable stickers and all of that?



I remember. But that? That was just what *I thought* real motherhood would look like and what a catalog or media told me what they thought it might look like. Oh, there are moments that work - but, really, the cute wicker baskets with chalk write on labels - if I had them - would stay like that for a day or so until someone decides to draw faces on them or pulls them off. So lets just look at real.

Real is the everyday. Get up at the crack of dawn. Try to find underwear in the clothes baskets that still needs to be folded. Pour cereal in a bowl. Look for school papers. Change diapers. Wash dishes. Sweep floor. Read stories. And on and on and on. That's normal. That's real.

It's just hard to see what we do finish because it's stuffed behind layers and layers of to-dos and don't dos and feeling like *you'll never measure ups* and feeling behinds and all of that. And that? That's why I want you to stop.

Remind yourself of all you do accomplish each day.



Maybe it's crazy and chaotic and loud - do I get the loud - and frenetic but also tucked within there are moments that one day will be gone. The kids will grow, the noise will lessen, the kitchen counters will actually stay clean, you'll get all the sleep that you want, you'll only have a couple loads of laundry a week and you know what? You'll miss this, this crazy of the throw in the towel days, just a bit.

I know it's hard some days. I know. And I know we struggle with those thoughts of I'm failing. I've read your comments - but you know - your comments make us real. Lets be real and encourage each other. Lets tell people that we struggle and have hard days and need a friend - and then let us be a generation that doesn't sit in it but instead rises up, brushes ourselves off, and seeks to try again.

We're in this motherhood race together.

Look at everything you've already done today. Look at when you did great - when you didn't flip out over spilled milk or when the laundry was caught up or when you just decided to forget about getting the dishes done and instead picked up your toddler and read the same book over and over and over.



Celebrate that today. Don't throw in the towel. Wipe some dishes.

Now, pick your self up, and lets do this day well.

Linking mothering arms with you.

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dear mom this is why you matter

I am writing to you.

You, the mom right in the midst of motherhood. You are the mom that I want to remind, on this day, that what you are doing every single day matters.

Sure, you might nod your head and *just* tell yourself it's *just* the dishes or *just* picking up toys or *just* anything. I've done that - that dismissing of motherhood and all of the giving that one most give. In fact, I do that all too often, that not looking at the day in and day out of all that motherhood entails and simply brushing it off as *just* another day. I'll tell myself that this is *just* what happens and *just* what we do as mothers - this giving of self over and over and over - and all the nitty-gritty stuff doesn't really matter. It's easy to lose sight of it all as you get lost in the often times monotony of the everyday.

But, truth is - **you matter**.



And more than that - being a mother and all that you do every single day makes a difference. A huge difference. These are lives that you are changing. Real, dear lives that look to you for love, wisdom, support and comfort. Those children need you.

All of those things - diaper changes, driving to soccer, sleeping on a hard floor next to a toddler who had a bad dream, wiping spaghetti covered faces, talking about not eating too much sugar, folding load after load of laundry, helping with homework, pumping up bike tires, reading books again and again, pouring cereal, memorizing math facts, cleaning up the backyard, laughing when you feel like crying - all that stuff matters.

It matters.



You could just keep saying that it's *just what a mom does*, and not look at the impact that mothers truly have on lives. But, today, today I encourage you to embrace how much all of that real life motherhood stuff that you do everyday matters. Look at that list of things that you do with fresh eyes - eyes that are giving yourself grace - knowing that despite the ups and downs and ins and outs and good days and bad days that what you are doing really makes a difference.

What you are doing is not a small thing.

It is a life changing, life nurturing, life growing real thing. These are the things that matter -- when you're in your last days you'll remember this. Your children will remember that. They will remember those meals that you slaved over, those times when you sat with them at night, the hours in the car, the listening to their dreams, all of that amazing stuff that is so easy to dismiss as not important.



Dear mom who needs to be reminded that she matters - this is your reminder.

Now, go back to all you are doing - your cleaning, working, driving, nose-wiping, cooking, clothes folding, everyday things - and hold your head high. Motherhood matters. More than having the perfect house, the perfect body, the perfect planning schedule, the perfect kids, the perfect anything. You are a game changer. A life changer. You are their mother.

This is why you matter.

Being a mother is a beautiful thing.

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What Readers Are Saying ...

I feel so blessed to have found your blog... you are truly inspiring. Your dear mom posts make me feel like you're talking directly to me. And the fact that you have 7 kids and have been through everything I'm going through (with only 2 kids), helps me to realize there's hope! Also loved your dear mom with littles - thanks for being a dear friend to all of us!
—Amy (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She is Failing**)

I always find inspiration in your words and encouragement to be the best Mom i can. My LO is only 7 months old, but I try to practice your words of wisdom so i can be the best me i can. Thank you thank you thank you! Cheers
—Tiffany (in reply to **Dear Mom This is Why You Matter**)

I literally felt like you wrote this for me...if anything you have made me realize that there is at least one other Mom out there like me! Yes...as I type this at 10:00 pm my sink has dirty dishes (which I was stressing over), I have a load of laundry in the washer and am folding the load in the dryer....and I am sure I will wake up running late...Can't express how much I LOVE this!
—Mandy (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She is Failing**)

Love this!! Sharing with a group of moms from my church. Though my own children are pretty much grown, many of them have very young children. Young and old alike will be comforted by this.
(in reply to **Dear Mom Some Important Words About Time**)

Click on the titles below to read these letters to moms on Rachel's blog:

Dear Mom Some Important Words About Time

Dear Mom a Letter About all of the Stuff

Dear Mom Who Sometimes Feels Like She is a Terrible Mom

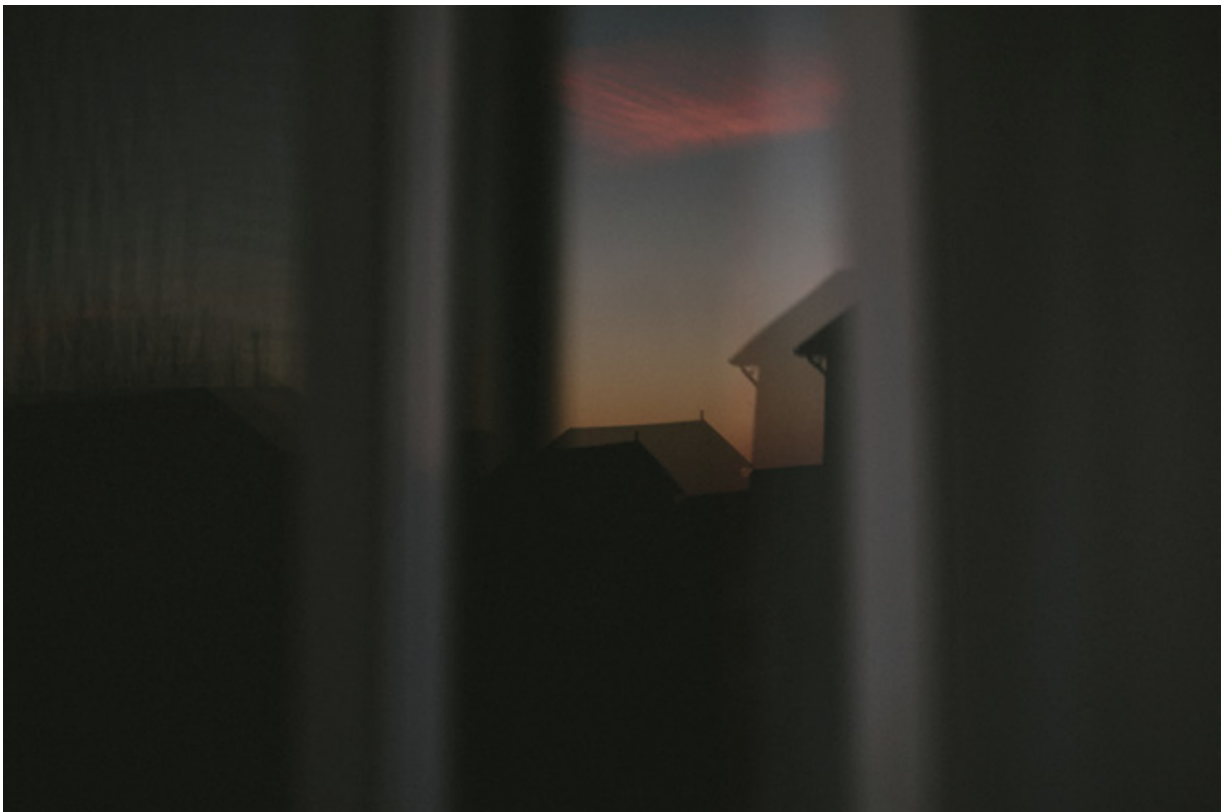
dear mom who feels discouraged

It's hard to feel discouraged.

If you're sitting there, on your side of the screen, reading these words and your heart is feeling heavy and discouraged, I am sorry. Sometimes life, the to-do lists, the daily grind, the challenges, the normal, the ups and downs, and all of that has a way of pulling all the energy from us and all that's left is a pile of discouragement.

I remember watching movies when I was little and even in intense conflicts it always seemed to resolve beautifully by the end. Real life can't be wrapped up in a two hour show. Life, real life, often times can simply feel discouraging and hard. And you know what? I hate that. I hate that perhaps you, right now, are reading these simple words typed out to you this morning, and are thinking *you have no idea how discouraged I feel*.

I wrote the letter about feeling like you're failing because I've felt that way before. And, now, today, I write this one, because I, too, have felt discouraged. We all have different stories - yours and mine and others and yet we all at some level can understand the angst of discouragement. It sits there. You watch others, looking at their lives, and wonder why yours isn't the same. Then the questions - *why me? why not? how come? don't I deserve it?* and then sometimes it gets pulled into feeling discouraged.



You need hope. A goal. A reminder.

You need to remember that life can be beautiful in the midst of normal. You need to remember that you matter and that your heart and your dreams matter. You need to remember that motherhood, and parenthood, all of that changes lives. You need to remember that normal can be absolutely wonderful. You need to remember that even though some days it feels like you do the same thing day after day after day that those same things build on each other and create this thing called real life.

You need to remember how important you are.

Yes, you. You. Right there, right now, with tears in your eyes. I have tears writing this because as I write to you I write to me. As I grumbled about picking up the same toys that I sorted yesterday, and I grumbled about dinner, and then I went to bed and thought I had everything perfect. Ready for the next day. The house was cleaned, the laundry almost done, the dinner plans ready - and I was ready.



Then the real day happened.

The house got messy before the breakfast dishes were done, the amazing Food Network dinner option that everyone raved about online was a disaster in my home, the laundry basket with perfectly folded clothes was dumped out, I didn't get my shower and someone came over, water spilled everywhere and markers were out and bled on the couch. There were bills to pay and relationships that were strained. And you know what? I ended up discouraged.

It's easy.

But, I don't want to live discouraged and I really don't want you to live feeling discouraged. I read your sweet notes - your emails and comments and Facebook posts - and I read about how you, too, want to live this embracing and loving the little things life of intentionality. And I love that. I love that you and I are a generation of women who are looking to rise above the circumstances and are willing to reclaim motherhood as a noble job beyond the perfection driven ideal that runs rampant. When you and I look at each other and tell each other well done, you matter, and you are making a difference we are kicking the discouragement feeling to the door.



So today, on this day in your life, I am looking at you and telling you those words.

Well done. You matter. And you are making a difference.

Because that is truth.

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What Readers Are Saying ...

I love your dear mom letters. I often feel like a failure, like I'm doing something wrong. Even though I tell myself that I'm not or that I'm not in a race, or that I'm not losing it is nice to hear it from you, another mom. Thank you
—anonymous (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She Doesn't Measure Up**)

Your blog found me just in time. A friend posted Dear Mom who thinks she is failing. I've been reading since. Thank you for being honest and real! Your words encourage me and make me feel less alone. Thank you! God bless!
—Elizabeth (in reply to **Dear Mom on the Hard Days**)

my story

Hey there...I'm Rachel...the voice behind Finding Joy.

And that?

It's a blog, a website, dedicated to seeking joy in life, specifically in motherhood. Intentional living, if you may. And that life philosophy? Well, you need to know a bit about me to know what I write about.

My life and how it relates to joy? I've had a decent share of challenging, nitty-gritty, time in the storm days. My husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2005. {He's now in remission.} We've lost jobs, had severe financial stress, and dreams that have been lost. And now, my littlest son, Samuel, has been diagnosed with Celiac Disease.



Through all of this the I've been taught to embrace, to live, joyfully and fully. Now. In this moment. No more waiting for things to get better, no lamenting the time lost, but rather finding joy in everyday - even when the everyday doesn't look perfect. It's in choosing to life today to it's fullest, being thankful, and above all grateful.

In diaper changes, paying bills, doctor visits, schooling, cooking, gardening, parenting, cleaning, working, laughing, organizing, crying, praying, and in just well, everyday daily life.

And that's what this blog is about -- my constant journey to find joy and to share with you that you, in the midst of your journey, are not alone. Let's just call it a spot to breathe in a busy and crowded online world full of should do this and should do that's -- it's a site of encouragement for mothers and a bit of intentional living mixed in.

You will find serious posts -- like when I deal with Celiac Disease or cancer. You will find humorous posts -- because I do have seven children and our lives provide laughs. You will find posts on motherhood. Actually, you will find a great deal of posts on motherhood. You will find posts on my faith. You will find posts on homeschooling -- which I've done for over ten years. You will find reviews of products and curriculum that we love -- check out the resources tab. You will find me writing about gluten free living and celiac disease. But, in all posts you hopefully will find joy and leave encouraged.

Because that's my heart.

It's a finding joy loving the little things embracing the everyday life heart.

—Rachel

dear mom who feels like she wants to quit

Don't quit.

I know it feels like the weight of the world is on your shoulders and that it really doesn't matter if the dishes are done or that no one really cares that you stayed up till 2 am folding laundry or that you are just overlooked. I know you sit in the car and put your head on the steering wheel and the tears roll down at times. I know that sometimes you just want to throw in the towel and whisper (or scream) that you've had enough of all of this. I know. I know because I have felt that way.

I remember sitting in the bathroom behind the door with my head in my hands thinking that I couldn't do this motherhood thing anymore and that I really didn't matter or make a difference and that I would never ever catch up on laundry - which, by the way, I've never really caught up on. And because I've felt that way I'm writing today to tell you that you, right now, matter more than you might ever realize.

You, and your life, your voice, your giving of self, and all of that matters.



There will be days that are hard. Weeks that are hard. Months that are hard. But, you can do this. I know you can. You can pick yourself up, brush off the words that hold you back, and you can be mom today. You can look in your children's eyes and tell them how much you love them - even though you are remembering how much they sass back to you this morning - and you can love them unconditionally. You can make those pbjs for lunch today and sliced apples and can actually get the straw in the juice pouch on the first time. Or the second. You can drive those kids to soccer or ballet or to school or to where ever and you will tell yourself that you sitting in the car with them matters.

Quitting means stopping. And you don't stop.

A wise friend of mine told me this weekend that we only fail when we quit.

Motherhood doesn't look anything like I imagined when I was young. Motherhood doesn't look like those Pinterest boards full of birthday ideas with perfect fondant cakes and party favors that take three hours to make. Those moments are there. But seriously, listen to me, those things don't make a mother. Those things, while they are beautiful, they don't really matter in the life journey. Do you know what matters? You. Right now, reading these words, who is about to give of herself for her family.



Do you realize what an amazing impact you are leaving? Don't tell me about all the times you've messed up. I've got them as well. But do you remember all the times where you have done well? Or the times when you've been there? Sitting up at one am rocking a toddler with a bad dream. Making dinner out of a pantry that is bare. Giving up on something you need so that your child can get what they need. Helping with math. Reading a story. Folding those clothes. Making lunches. Teaching. Listening to their stories. Being silly. Laughing. Holding the puke bucket. Wiping faces. Putting art on the wall. Watching them sleep.

Those are the moments in life that you are blessed to live.

So you may feel like you want to quit. Don't. Pick up the motherhood towel right now and instead tell yourself you can do this today. You can. You can for your family. Don't look at how Sally is mothering, or what the Facebook status states, or the Pinterest picture of the perfect mother. You are the perfect mother for your children today. Do not let the world qualify your motherhood. There is no price tag large enough that would ever illustrate the true value of motherhood. You are an amazing gift to your family.

I believe in you.

What are you waiting for? You can do this, sweet mother.

You totally can.

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dear mom who likes everything perfect {and needs grace}

I am with you.

I'm the gal who sorts markers, pencils, crayons, scissors and all into separate labeled boxes. I like the books in order and the DVD's by category and clothes hung in colored sequence. I like the day to go by clockwork, with check marks, goals completed and not many bumps in the road. I don't care for messes, and have a hard time getting things done when there's clutter. A perfectionist, right? And, yet, as I've written so many times I'm the perfectionist who tries so hard to not be the perfectionist.

Life is messy.

Real life doesn't really care if I have the craft supplies sorted or that the island is clean or that the clothes are folded and put away perfect. Real life is like my Christmas tree, that the kids, including one who wore his shirt backwards, so carefully decorated the bottom and me fussing over the top, falling over within one hour of us being done. Ornaments, water, lights and all in a tangled mess was the result. And, I was late. I had a dinner to go to, was straightening my hair, and all of a sudden I was faced with a curveball in the routine. The curveball was a seven and a half foot tree, heavy with ornaments, resting on my area rug in the living room with piles of Hungarian gold glass bulbs crushed underneath.

Laugh or cry.



I chose to laugh. There really was nothing I could do, the perfectionist who tries to not be such a perfectionist, at the moment. My family was watching - waiting to see my response - and they mattered more than the bulbs scattered everywhere. Then I saw Grace's first year Christmas 2001 ornament snapped in two. As I picked it up, my oldest daughters, who both stepped in to help me clean, looked at me and said *it's just a thing, mom*. Just a thing. My perfectionist heart had to let it go. It was a thing and they mattered more. They watched me as I looked at them and told them, *yes, it's just a thing, you're right*.

And so to you, the mom who might like everything perfect or who is living in a life where nothing seems to make sense I'm telling you that you are not alone. Despite the Hallmark movies dotting the television programming and the perfect Target toy ads and the Currier and Ives decorations at the store life is honestly

just a bit messy. And, honestly, some of the hardest years of my life have been tucked in the midst of Christmas - I don't know if it is the ideal that is placed out there and then when things go awry it's even more painful and difficult. And for one who likes stuff perfect, that makes it even harder.



But sweet dear mom - you can do this in the midst. Do you know why I love everything so perfect? It's about me trying to control the circumstances of life. But, sometimes, and what I'm learning through life, and perfectly illustrated with my tree falling, is that there are things that we can't control - health, finances, relationships, trees falling, kids not fussing, snow days on days when you need to go out - and in those moments we just have to let it go and to choose to live embracing relationships and letting go of things. Even when things are messy there can still be beauty - my tree is standing this morning, with ornaments that I need to rearrange and lights that need fixing - but it's standing.

Dear mom, whose life might not be perfect, life is still good. You and me and all the others moms out there who love to keep stuff just a certain way have a challenge today. And that challenge? To embrace today and to not let perfectionist ideals define our happiness. You can still be joyful, creative, encouraging, content, motivated, loving, caring, hopeful, happy, determined, and full of life even when life isn't perfect.



Look at your kids. They want you. They want you to be there in the trenches laughing with them and ignoring the crayons and markers that are mixed in a pile on the table and instead looking at them and giving them a real, joyful smile. That matters. Most.

Motherhood is an amazing journey of learning to let go, to embrace, and to live with a heart that is content in the middle of crazy.

What you are doing right now, today, matters. Do not let the world ever drive the importance of that from you. If you take one thing from this letter, let it be this - you matter, you matter, you matter - and being a mother is an amazing gift - and your children need you. Not the perfect mom, but you. That is grace. Needed grace in the midst of motherhood.



Now go. Live today. Expect it won't be perfect, but still embrace the beauty in today. You matter.

From me, the perfectionist letting go mom, to you.

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dear mom with the little one crying in the store

Breathe.

Just breathe.

We've all been there. In the store, with a little one, melting on the floor, the floor you've hoped has been washed, melting right there with that loud toddler or preschool cry while the rest of the world pushes their carts with food nearby. It's those parenting challenge times - where you're forced to parent in front of the audience of your local store.



Yesterday, it was me.

We were in the store - just for a quick run for some cereal and bread and maybe strawberries if they were still on sale. Before we went in I talked to my six and four year old boys and told them what we were getting and that we were getting nothing more. Elijah, the four year old, was to hold my hand the entire time because he has this tendency to run off {quickly} and check things out.

I knew I was in for a challenge when the sliding doors opened - when he jumped around and attempted to run and very loudly exclaimed - *look at all the amazing stuff!*

Patience. That's what I kept telling myself. Patience. Love. But everything was so cool. The berries, the books, the fireworks display at the entrance {yep, it was right there}, the cereal option {my kids live in a gluten free world of cereal limiting their choices to about 5 cereal options so imagine every time they see an entire row of cereal}, the cakes, the ice cream, balloons hanging, toys in the cereal aisle {why} and more. He was doing well, really. Until that moment when he tried to dash to look at the gluten full cookies on display and proceeded to duck in front of me causing me to trip and him to stumble as he attempted to leave my hand.



He was irritated that he wasn't going over to those cookies.

I tried to pick him up, and there right there in front of the 3for\$10 frozen pizza display he decided to sit down and let out a loud *I want to look at the cookies* wail. Yes, I'm working on being a yes mom, but in this instance, the answer was simply no. We can't do gluten in the house and I set the expectations of the shopping trip in the car. I needed to stick with them. I knew people were walking around looking, but honestly, I've learned to not care. Not care in the *I'm just going to let my child cry* way, but not care in letting the crying stress me out so it distracts me from my parenting.

And that's what I'm writing to you about. Your child melting inside the store isn't a reflection of your parenting skills. Now, I might be writing you something different if you react like that parent I wrote about weeks ago. You know, the one you yelled very loudly at her child in Target about being such a jerk. That's different. That's unacceptable - I don't care what they're doing you just don't resort to calling your four year old names.

You see I didn't yell. Instead I crouched down, looked little Elijah in the eyes, and reminded him of our conversation in the car. About how we were only getting bread, cereal, strawberries and now one package of snaps for the sidewalk for \$1. He still didn't like it. He was still just a wee bit loud.



This wasn't about me looking like I had the perfect child, or me talking loudly and screaming at him to stop, this was about me stepping out of my comfort zone and recognizing that he needed me down at that level. And remembering, that if you're a parent, and there were probably lots of parents wandering in the store, chances are they've gone through the same thing. Different day, same scenario.

So I scooped him up, right by those pepperoni pizzas, and carried him while my Caleb picked up our basket of food. We went to pay, he wanted gum - another cry, but we still left with what we came in for and those \$1 snaps.

I brought him to the car, buckled him up, and looked in his little face, that face that I love no matter what, and told him *I loved him* and that *I was glad that he got to go with me to the store* on that Wednesday morning. I told him about all the times in the store where he did great - in the cereal aisle when I had to say no to all those cereals, and by the strawberries, and the fireworks display when the question was asked about that \$39 box of noise, and then we talked just for a bit about the cookie and why I had to say no.

He matters more than me looking good.

He deserves more.



Mothers, they will melt down in the store. They simply will. Shut out the world around you, focus on your child, and do your best. We're not here to judge. Not at all.

Mothering is hard. It takes work, a thick skin, patience, and strong arms to carry little ones crying through a store. Sure there are the beautiful days, creative days, and wonderful days - but there are also an equal amount of the other. In fact, right now, as I type these words, my little Elijah, my precocious exploring child is sitting at the table, tapping a paintbrush full of black messy paint and splattering it on the table, and being quite content with who he is right now.

I'm an artist, mamma.



Yep. An artist. In training. Who wanted a gluten full cookie. Who I love no matter what.

That's what I told myself while I knelt on the floor next to him in the store that morning.

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dear moms who feel stuck in a rut

It's everyday. Right?

You get up, not on your own time, and you start giving from the beginning of the day until your weary head hits the pillow late at night. The list of all to do is longer than the hours in the day, and it feels as if you're adding more to it than you are taking off. After a while, the days, well, the days start to blur together. Instead of going to bed feeling rewarding, fulfilled, and energized you go to bed wondering if you'll have enough energy to make it through the next day of the same.

Mothering wasn't supposed to be like this. Wasn't it about sweet morning hugs, and gymboree clothes without stains, and organic waffles with berries in the morning? Even in the hard times wasn't there a clean house, with trendy decor, a stocked pantry, and gourmet four cheese macaroni?

But, here you are, feeling stuck. Where did the creativity go? The energy? The joy? The love of those motherhood days that we dreamed about when we were young?



You're a good mom even on those feeling stuck in a rut days of motherhood. And, let me tell you, having a bad day, or feeling irritated, or without creativity, or stuck doesn't mean that you're not a good mom. We all go through those days when we just don't want to do one more load of laundry and we tell everyone please don't put anything in the hamper for at least 20 minutes and we're tired of tacos for dinner and we just want the living room to stay clean for the morning. Having a day like that doesn't mean that you're not doing a great job.

We just get stuck in a rut.

Often we look at the big things to change the pattern. We think that if we had just a bit more money, or free time, or the latest book, or we lost weight, or we ate better, or started to run, or read the next and best parenting book that we might get out of this rut and be able to change our mindset. Who wants to live overwhelmed? We want to be happy, right? But, to me, happy is elusive. You can chase and chase and chase it - and it lasts just for a moment - and then it's gone. And you're left. Right where you started. Joy isn't happy - joy is a posture of the heart that embraces the present in the ups and downs and seeks just a bit of gratitude in the everyday. Seek joy instead.



Having those days or feeling stuck in a rut - it's okay. If there was such a thing as super mom even that mythical super mom would eventually get stuck in a rut. Moms, busy moms, start by taking a peek at your day. Chances are there are some things that feel overwhelming that are thus making the day overwhelming. Identify them. Choose one or two and change it up. Start with your children. Alter the routine - make pancakes for breakfast, go play in the backyard, pull out the crayons and color with them. Be engaged. Then look for one thing in your home - laundry? cooking? cleaning? emails? Work to change that one thing. Develop a system for laundry, or some new menus, or a strategy for email. But don't sit in what you were doing.

You see, I've discovered that I could spend so much time sitting in the rut moments or the overwhelmed moments of life that I don't move. So today, I want you to move. Be intentional - take five minutes and look at your day and what you can do to change it. The change comes from you - not the externals, but from you.

You can do it.

You are a mother with creativity, energy, and joy. Sometimes we lose it for a bit, but it's there. When you go to bed tonight I want you to write down, mental note, write in lipstick on the mirror, email, Facebook, but record at least three good things from today. Three things. That's it. Work on your one thing to change, and then record three moments of good. Of joy. You'll keep moving forward.



So dear mom who feels stuck, lets get moving and get out of that rut.

One step forward. One step.

Ready?

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What Readers Are Saying ...

I happened to click on this link on my pinterest board, right after having a moment of tears and overwhelming stress thinking how is our family going to pull through this week, and how tired and worn out I am. Then God led me to this beautiful written letter of encouragement to all moms. Thank you! This is exactly what I need to pull me through the day.

—anonymous (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She Wants to Quit**)

Your words in these letters to Moms always seem to fill my heart and give me a push to keep going, to keep loving and to keep sacrificing. Thank you. Thank you so, so much.

—Danielle ((in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She Wants to Quit**)

the future of finding joy

I'm so blessed to be able to have a platform like this to share my heart, to offer encouragement, to talk about celiac disease and living gluten free, to provide some laughs, to focus on living intentional, and to celebrate motherhood.

Writing, to me, is art. When I write I'm able to look at life, and motherhood, through a different lens. It's almost as if I can step back, can see the joy, and can remind not only you, but myself, that I can do this motherhood thing well.

Sometimes it's easy to see where we don't finish or measure up versus everything that we do well. This site has become a reminder to many about the joy and beauty in motherhood, and I am grateful to share in that voice of encouragement.

The most rewarding part of Finding Joy is that we walk together. I may start the conversation, but the conversation is where the real joy happens. I don't plan to change that, ever.

But as I grow in Motherhood I know our conversation will grow and change as well. I'll still write to encourage you, because when you're encouraged you energize the whole group.

I hope things. I hope we get closer and share our broadest ideals. Life is a journey, with twists and turns that we can't plan on. As we take this journey don't ever forget to share your thoughts, insights and ideas. We can't grow together unless we're open and caring.

So thanks for being this community. Lots of people write Dear Mom Letters. What I write resonates with a lot of you, but you know from experience that it's also the love, joy, and encouragement found in authentic community that reminds us all just how much motherhood matters.

Thanks again. Friends.

I was introduced to this blog by a friend and fellow Mom :) I love these letters and I totally think when you have enough accumulated you should make a book. It would be my number one gift for every new Mom. I see Mommies all the time being so hard on themselves and when we put that kind of pressure on ourselves its like a downward spiral. If you feel bad about yourself it's hard to do a good job and if you feel like your failing you're just gonna feel worse and worse. Your blog allows women to forgive themselves - know it's ok not to be perfect and move on in a more positive way. Thank you :)

—*anonymous (in reply to Dear Mom Letters)*

dear moms who have said because i said so

I've said it as well.

I remember being a child thinking to myself that I would never ever utter those words - those *because I said so* - words to my children. Then real motherhood life came. And I became a mom and becoming a mom brings with it a whole slew of new challenges. Things like toddlers who don't listen and color on the walls with permanent markers, and kids that are fighting while you're desperately trying to get the chicken nuggets out of the 425 degree oven, and laundry that you forgot was in the washing machine {go check yours now} and the soccer shirt that is needed in 15 minutes that is sitting in there.

Then, at that point as all of that is happening, you get faced with the inevitable and unending barrage of questions. *Can I do this? Watch this? Go? Eat this? Climb this? Read this? Have this?*

So you blurt it out after you said no a dozen times and they've asked why two dozen times.

Because I said so.

Yep.



Honestly, even though I try and try to stay away from those words, it's okay. Life is about limits and rules and understanding boundaries. I want to listen, to be positive, to understand, to teach, to laugh, to encourage creativity, to be the mom that is intentional and focused with her children. But, I also know that children need boundaries - including respecting the answer that is given. I mean, it's about 11 minutes to dinner time and the question is for chips and honestly I am not going to give them chips when there is an entire dinner coming.

The funny thing about *because I said so* and other phrases is that somehow I thought I could make it through motherhood without ever blurting out those words. I know, I know, you read in the intentional parenting books about how I probably should have stated that the chips aren't healthy and that dinner is coming very soon and that we need to practice patience. Great. It's excellent advice. However, in those moments of pure motherhood overwhelm, when the smoke detector is going to go off due to the now burning chicken nuggets and wake the toddler that you finally got napping, often the only thing that comes to mind is the *because I said so* phrase.



We need grace mothers. We need to be real. I'm not going to do you any favors if you read my words, my ponderings about motherhood, and give you the illusion that in every and all moments that I have the perfect parenting answer and response. That's not authentic. And without authenticity, really there isn't much hope.

Want to know something? I'm not perfect. You're not perfect. There is no perfect never saying *because I said* so mother out there. I've got flowers wilting outside, and dishes to do, and a floor to sweep, and a bathroom to clean. I mess up. I get impatient, frustrated, and exasperated. Motherhood isn't about being perfect. It's about getting up in the morning and trying to do your best again and then giving yourself grace when you go to bed.



I'm a motherhood work in progress along with you. There's no mold to fit, there is only figuring out your own motherhood mold. It's about coming alongside other moms and being real and talking about the struggles and ups and downs and then encouraging each other on.

We're in this together, moms.

Because I said so.

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dear moms with a messy house

Yeah, the messy house.

The house that inevitably someone will show up at your door on the day that it's the worst versus the day when it was spotless. The house, that if you're like me, makes me want to slightly scream in frustration and then go on to utter words like *no one cares about keeping things clean* and *wasn't this just clean?* as you wander throughout the home picking things up here and there.

Here's the deal. You have kids. And having kids means that inevitably sometimes the house will get messy unless you're following them 24/7 and allow no toys out and have forever banned play dough and paint. Here's the second deal - if your house is messy it doesn't define you as a mom.

But, before I give the green card and the *go keep racing past go to keep the house messy* card, I'm going to tell you that we as moms can work together to keep our homes organized. Yes. Work together - and that often is through talking about the challenges, struggles, and managing the home versus plastering on the smile of perfectionism and running ourselves ragged trying to keep it at a Pinterest perfection ideal. An inevitable messy house moment is bound to happen, but chronic messy? Well, for me, I just can't do that for too long until I pull out the large glad bag sack and start filling it with stuff to donate or throw. I've found that my kids behave better when things are in order. Just the other day I deep cleaned the boys room and when I was done they danced with joy in the room and played for hours in their organized room. And yep, it got a bit messy again - that's okay - they're kids and they're playing.



But, you've overwhelmed with where to start? Right?

Just last week I chatted with my dear friend Tara at Feels Like Home about homes and messes and clutter and you guessed it, my words? Do one thing. Find one thing and do it and do it well.

So, for me, I've found the one things - laundry that's not too behind, a clean living room, a tidy island -that make me feel better about my home and I've set goals for the home. Are they always kept? No. Remember I have little ones wandering around who are curious creatures that I don't want watching television all the time and I encourage playing, exploring, and learning. Part of being curious means that

they naturally make messes. That is how they learn -- so they mix the colors and markers and crayons. And want to dump out the legos and mix them with the lincoln logs and the army men.

My first instinct? Absolutely not. One thing out at a time and put that away immediately and then vacuum the floor. But, I can't be like that. Instead, I've learned to sigh just a bit and let the mixing up of toys go and instead embrace the joy and learning. Then we clean later. They know that we're going to tidy after lunch and clean at night. It's good to teach order and responsibility.



So, dear moms with a messy house, my words to you first would be that your home doesn't define you as a mother. Not at all. Don't compare. Don't compare your house when you have toddlers with your dear friends home who only has teens. Don't compare it with the Family Fun magazine that arrives with the color coded baskets and neatly stacked books. Do not compare. Learn.

Then I would tell you to work to create spaces within your home that are clean and organized - a sanctuary of sorts where you can sit and rest and relax. Make it your entry area - that way when people drop in and the remainder of the house has remnants of the fort built and paper airplanes around and 47 army men mixed with duplos scattered about you can usher them into the living space and just breathe.

And don't apologize either if it's messy. Just let that go - that's being real. Honest. And it breaks that cycle of everyone needing to have their homes show ready 24/7. Being real means giving grace.



And then, moms, just that do one thing. Identify the trigger areas in your home that create the mess {like my kitchen island - if that goes - then the kitchen goes} and whatever you do try to keep it clean. Guard it. Try to go to bed with that one area clean. And if you don't? Do it in the morning. It's the keep trying, the keep moving, the not comparing, the not letting the house pull at your joy that matters. The last one? The one on joy? That's hard for me - as a too messy home makes it harder for me to feel content - which is why I work so hard to keep certain areas clean.

Remember, dear moms with the messy house, one day the little ones that travel around messing things up will one day be gone and your house will be spotless. I know I'm telling you this again, but it's so good to be reminded. Your house at one point will be exactly how you want it, but you won't have little one's around - picking you flowers, coloring pictures, dumping out Legos to make you *the best creation ever*, splashing water from the tub - that will be over and you will inevitably miss the days where the home seemed a wee bit too chaotic.



So work hard. Don't give up. It is good to aim for neat and tidy - just remember this is a season.

From one mom who fights the mess but looks for joy to another.

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dear moms with little babies

This post was inspired by the five hours where I was absolutely blessed to watch my dear friend Maria's two and a half month old daughter Emma. Spending time with her in my home reminded me of those days when I'd have new little ones in my home. Those hours with a little baby in my home brought back all those days when I was so grateful to get a dinner on the table. Memories.

Dear Moms with Little Babies,

Your main goal right now?

To be a mom to that sweet little baby in your home.

I know. You're reading this thinking about all that you have to do. Or more than that you're thinking about all that you got done right before that baby came home. Remember those days of nesting? The cleaning, and sorting, and cleaning again, and the decluttering? Of course you do. But, you cannot do that right now. You absolutely cannot be thinking about those tasks or how behind you are from your once scheduled routine. Let go of the worry that you're behind - it will only frustrate - and instead simply expect that your life won't feel balanced or normal.



It is beautiful to have those new babes in your home. There is new life, new joys, new laughter, new energy, new smiles - that you, the mom gets blessed to share everyday. But, dear moms with little babies, it is also completely exhausting. You are on demand every single second of the day and night. You get no sleep. Your house is in disarray. You can't remember what it's like to be caught up on laundry. You are lucky if dinner is done before seven pm.

Give. Give. Give.

The days blur into weeks and you're tired. And after a while you kind of wish for the order that you had in the weeks earlier. Oh, I know you love that little one. I know. I've been blessed to bring home seven little babes into our home. And seven times I've had to learn how to relearn how to do life. Yes, that's it. It's a surrender of control, and a being willing to embrace a new version of normal.



So I'm telling you that if you are offered help - take help. I don't care if the laundry is piled up, if someone wants to help you then you open your door, you smile with your tired smile, and you let them bless you with help. Don't apologize for the piles of laundry, or messy floors, or your hair being in a ponytail. That's okay - you're doing something amazing right now - you are nurturing a baby fulltime. You will have your turn to bless others, but now, right now when you have a new little one in your home you need to be blessed.

But, what if you don't get help? Then you need to give yourself extra grace. And you, tired mom but blessed mom with your newborn, you chose one thing each day to accomplish. Do it in bits throughout the day and when you are overwhelmed or tired look at what you've finished. But give yourself that grace. Your home, especially in those early newborn months, is not a reflection of who you are and your homemaking skills.

Relish these days - these sweet babymoon days. I look back and remember those little babies that were content to sit in my arms. {When they sleep - you simply must rest - and that is good.} I know it's a blur, and it's oh so tiring, but there is something almost magical {even in the exhaustion} about holding teeny little ones who only need you. They'll grow and these busy days will just be a distant memory.



Sit now, hold your little one in your arms, and look at that teeny face, that little face that will someday call you mamma, and rest in the joy and the gift of being a mother. Rest. Do your one thing. Accept help. Breathe. And don't compare the normal of right now to your normal. The normal will come, and with it will be an integration of a new life, a new little one, into your life.

You, mom of a little baby, are blessed. Busy, exhausted, craving normal and sleep, but blessed.

Enjoy your babymoon.

It will soon be a memory.

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Click on the titles below to read these letters to moms on Rachel's blog:

Dear Mom You Are Amazing

Dear Mom Who Needs to Let Go of Mom Guilt

dear moms with littles

You amaze me.

Yes, I know you might read this and think that I have seven kids and wonder why am I writing a letter to you, with the littles, but you see yesterday I was reminded how hard it is to be a mom to just those little ones. My older girls were gone -- at ballet and with a friend -- and my older boys were with my husband at taekwondo. Leaving me home. Alone. With my very busy Samuel and extremely precocious Elijah.

Oh my goodness.

I forgot. I've forgotten how busy those years were with just those littles underfoot. There was running, jumping, loud noises, needing me, more loud noises, and lots and lots of busy action going on. I needed to get the kitchen cleaned and dinner made and then the phone rang and, well, it was just me.

You mothers of littles, I know that sometimes your days are a blur and that you feel like you don't get much accomplished, but the truth is -- you do a ton. And I mean it. You work very very very hard with those *trying to learn to be independent* little ones.



They don't sit still - you don't sit still. They run around - you run after them. They're hungry {again} - you get them food {again}. You try to sit down -- they pull you up. They dump out the toys - you clean them up. You answer the phone - they start fighting over a toy. You, well, you are busy.

I want you to know that what you are doing matters -- and that where you are right now in your parenting journey is seriously one of the hardest stages in my own parenting journey. You are needed all day long. It is exhausting. There is no fanfare, no awards, no blue ribbons, no nothing for being a mom. And sometimes, it's easy to think that what you are doing doesn't matter. That your work - the picking up, cleaning, diaper-changing, nose wiping, feeding, rocking, reading, cooking and more doesn't matter.

But, dear sister, it matters. Deeply. Life matters.

You keep going. Keep loving on your children.



They grow, dear moms of those little ones. They grow, they grow, they grow, they grow. And soon the one dumping out the blocks will be reading, busy on the phone, doing something -- and you will want them around you while you think back with nostalgia at those little ones underfoot days.

You are amazing. Absolutely amazing. Being a mom is never something to dismiss.

I'm giving you a gold star. :)

Now, just keep going.

Love,
me

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dear overwhelmed mom

written on a Monday evening after returning from a three day conference

I'm writing to you because today that was me. Or at least it's how I feel right now. I've walked into a home with sick children, some very sick, and a messy house, and laundry to do, groceries to buy, rooms to clean, dishes to wash, teaching to be done, a lawn to be mowed, and a to-do list longer than one side of paper. Honestly? I just feel overwhelmed. It's like I'm peering at a world, my life, with so much to do and just me staring at it not knowing where to start.

I kind of want to sit in the corner, put my head in my lap, and have a good cry.

But, then there's my two year old saying my name, and the four year jumping from a stair higher than I let him, and my six year old asking to play a game, my sick eight year old having a coughing fit, my ten year old not wanting to unload the dishes, a fourteen year old who was supposed to teach ballet, and an almost sixteen year old who needs to rest.

And I must make dinner, but between you and me, I cannot find my counter.



I know I'm not to live in overwhelm. You're not either. So here are my words, what I remembered, while sitting on my couch looking at every single thing that needed to be done on that way too long list.

It won't last.

You are not alone.

You are not the only mom who feels overwhelmed at time. Life pushes so much on our plate. Do this, do that, do more, do less, do extra, do and do and do. It's exhausting and overwhelming and sometimes can feel very lonely. But, you, are not alone. All those do things don't define us as mothers. They simply don't. Do not measure your worth based on what you have left to do.



Oh, dear overwhelmed mom, you **will** move out of this feeling. I know you will. I did. It's not dependent upon having everything perfect - my counters are still buried, my dishes waiting to be done, and the house a mess. It was a change of my heart and of my perspective. I wanted everything done immediately. Not possible. Did you hear me? Not possible. That's where the overwhelm came - I saw too much to do and made it impossible for me to get it done in the five minutes I wanted it fixed in. So instead, I prayed, and changed my perspective - I did one thing. I sat down, watched two little boys of mine blowing bubbles into their iced tea, and I laughed. I found a bit of joy that I missed when I let overwhelm rule.

You're stronger than overwhelm.



So mothers, stand up, brush yourself off, and find one thing to do. That's it. One thing. You can do one thing. You can. Just keep doing one thing. That's it.

Hug those kids. Play with them. Let them make you laugh. They need you.

You can beat overwhelm. Find joy instead.

And you will.

~me

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What Readers Are Saying ...

you are simply amazing, I share many of your posts and urge all the moms I know to subscribe to your blog.... always so real and insightful and to the heart of things.... like you are peaking into my life so many times, mom's need more than anything to know they are not alone in the struggles of motherhood and your writing does just that. Thank you so very much!

—Rae-Leah (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Worries if She is a Good Mom**)

A friend shared this yesterday and it brought tears to my eyes. Yesterday was particularly rough - I am just way too over-committed and haven't gotten nearly enough sleep lately. I felt completely useless and frazzled by the day's end. Then I read this and all of a sudden things felt a lot better. Thank you for your beautiful, encouraging, and nurturing words.

—Shannon (in reply to **Dear Mom Who Feels Like She Wants to Quit**)

I'm not going to lie: God is using you in a mighty way. I am going through a REALLY dark time right now, struggling to see the light in even the brightest situations. But your words speak right to my heart. And JUST when I need it, you put up a new encouraging post. And sometimes I spend an hour perusing your Dear Mom letters and just crying. Because no matter how many kidlets we have, what kind of struggles they have, we are Moms...and literally the only people that truly understand us is each other. Thank you for this (and all) post(s). Know that as you're typing out these words, God is using them to impact someone who is just...really struggling...in that moment. Be blessed.

—Jos (in reply to **Dear Mom this is Why You Matter**)

Click on the titles below to read these letters to moms on Rachel's blog:

Dear Mom Who Worries if She is a Good Mom

Dear Mom Who Feels Like She is Going to Explode

dear overworked mom

this is a continuation of the letter dear overwhelmed mom

Now, you don't know where to start.

The list of to-do things is so long. You feel like you're drowning in things to do - laundry, cooking, cleaning, cleaning some more, teaching, gardening, shopping, organizing, potty-training, character training, mopping, sorting, praying, trying not worry, housework and more - and it's only nine in the morning. You look around and all you're seeing is the work that must be done. Yesterday.

It's zapping the joy out of life.

Everything becomes a chore.

Being a mother begins to feel like a chore - the joy fades.



The little one running around makes a mess - more work. The milk spills, the blocks are dumped out, the paper thrown off the table, the bikes left on the walk, the piece of bread on the floor, the cabinet doors broken, driving to classes, and crayon on the wall - work, work, work. And it falls on your shoulders. Overwhelming, really.

I know. I've muttered words about being overwhelmed and how no one cares that the laundry is spilling out of the laundry room and that I feel so alone. Remember what I wrote you several weeks ago? Remember?

You're not alone.



But, dear overworked mom, here's the deal - you and I can't stay feeling overwhelmed. We could, but then things would just keep piling on more and more and more. And then, we'll be sitting in an even worse case of overwhelm. And the laundry will spill up the stairs, and the crumbs will grow, and life will become a chore. We'll become miserable. Grumbling about being a mom because we lost the joy in being a mom.

So do that one thing.

I know I've written that to you before, but it's easy to *forget* when you're in the midst of a spinning and racing and busy life. But, I'm going to tell you again, just do one simple thing. Maybe it's a load of laundry. Cooking breakfast. Cleaning off your island. Reading a book to the toddler. Sitting down with your teenager. Driving to the store. Letting yourself laugh again. One thing plus one thing plus one thing will get things done. Stop judging yourself by what you think others think you should do or what you think they get done or how things should look.

Here's the truth - no one has a life that looks like a Pinterest board. No one has a life stays like the page in the magazine. No one, no mother, can go through life without having those days where the hair stands up straight and you're ready for the next day in the morning and the to-do list has things listed on it that should have been done last week.

Real life is messy. The beauty isn't in the perfection, but rather in seeing the beauty in the everyday. Ordinary. In things that the world dismisses as imperfect, but we as mothers can see them as perfect.



It's time that we link arms, mothers. Enough comparing. Competing. Putting on the masks of perfection that are leading each other to overwhelm. It's time that we encourage each other to do the next thing, to get up, to keep trying, to keep moving, to rest when needed, to have grace, to love, to not judge, to find the joy in mothering. It's easy to live in that overwhelm place of life, but then life just races by.

Oh, mom, with the forever to-do list, and littles tugging at your feet, and middlers needing to get driven some where, and more - this is just life. Busy, crazy, messy, perfect life.

You can do it. You can do your one thing and then move to the next one thing. You can calm your heart and choose to life with intentionality in the midst of crazy. You can say no to things in life and yes to others. You can love boldly putting your family first. You can do it, dear overworked mom, you can. You can slow down, really.

You can find joy in the midst.

It's in the little things - the everyday overworked things that we miss when we live in overwhelm.

You can do it. You can live awake, intentional, and aware. You can do it.



Stand up. Pick one thing. Do it well.

You can do it. I am linking arms with you.

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dear sweet mom who feels like she is failing

You're not.

If you and I were sitting in Starbucks and you had your fave drink and I had my Caramel Macchiato I'd look at you, and I'd tell you the truth - you're not failing.

I know. I'm guessing, you'd wipe away the tears, and look up, and try to nod your head, but inside, inside well, you'd think that those are nice words but seriously she has no idea. You know why I know? Because I've sat in a coffee shop, across from a friend, a friend who looked me smack in the face and told me that I wasn't failing and that I was doing a great job.

I wanted to tell her about the dishes from yesterday sitting on my counter. And how the pile of storybooks wasn't read again. And that I'm a week behind in laundry. And that I got really really irritated at the mixture of 13 toys all dumped in a pile that two days ago was sorted into 13 labeled boxes. I wondered if she knew that some days, some days I get up and just go through the mom motions without even really finding much joy. It felt like drudgery.



How could she tell me I wasn't failing?

Yet, I wasn't.

Somehow in the mixed up media world we've got these thoughts of moms being perfect. Society doesn't give us a break. I mean read this article in the New York Times about the pressure on moms to look a certain way after they give birth. And then? Then we're to be ultra creative, crafty, humorous, happy, chipper, up before dawn, to sleep after dark, with our sinks shined, and the laundry folded, and tomorrow's breakfast in the crockpot, with tomorrow's dinner - pulled from our once-a-month cooking thawing in the fridge, while we work out for 20 minutes on odd days and 40 minutes on even days, and our hair is always done, we're makeup ready, our fridges are stocked, and the craft closet bursting with ideas for that quick perfect afternoon art project that we'll place on our recycled wood and mod podged adorned hand painted chalkboard.

And, in reality, it's 8am and we're just getting up. The baby was up all night, or the toddler sick, or honestly, we were just tired. We get our coffee and flip on Facebook and our stream is flooded with stuff people have already done {I always tell myself -- different time zones} and we're racing to catch up with this never before except for the last hundred years perfect never feel like you're failing mom ideal that is exhausting.



You know what my friend told me? She told me to slow down. Slow down? How in the world when I felt like I was failing was I to slow down? I had way way way too much to do and I needed to read that parenting book to work on my attitude and and and...and. And she told me enough. And that I was a good mom.

You know, you're not failing.

You need to start to see all you do accomplish in a day. All the smiles of encouragement, meals made, clothes changed, books read, and more. Just like I wrote yesterday - we make mistakes {ten things moms need to remember} - we just need to learn from them. We're out of breath, racing, and exhausted, but truly not failing. Failing means stopping. Not getting up, not trying, not giving. That's not you.

I want you to stop telling yourself you're failing. Instead I want you to replace it with *I can do this*.

You can do this.



Those soundtrack words and feeling about failing are just feelings. Don't let them define you anymore. If you hear *I'm failing* replace it immediately with *I can do this*.

If you were across the table from me that is what I would tell you.

And, of course, I'd tell you *do one thing*. I'm going to write and say it again and again and again. Write your list of things you want to do, need to do, and would love to do today with your family. And then, do one thing from each list. If you stumble, brush yourself off, and start again. Don't worry that the neighbor across the street seems to be doing twenty or the Pinterest pin tells you that the perfect home can be achieved in 6 Easy Steps. This is your life - and you - you are the perfect mother for those children. God knew when he blessed those kids to you.



Remember that.

You are a good mom. You matter. You are making a difference.

You can do this. One step, one day, at a time.

From me, one mom in the midst of motherhood, to you.

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dear tired mom

Being a mom is exhausting, isn't it? You wake at the crack of dawn with a to-do list that is already behind, and you move and run and give of yourself all day long.



There are mouths to feed, and floors to scrub, diapers to change, books to read, laundry to do, quarrels to resolve, and bills to pay. You clean only to have the next room made a mess. You cook and then cook and then cook again. And the cry, that constant cry for mom, it just keeps coming all day long.

Then there's the worry and fretting and stuff. You know, about health, education, and <gasp> if you're being a good mom. Here's a secret.

You are a good mom.

We live in a world that tells us that our kids need this and that and that we as a mom need to be a certain way. You know, creative all the time, patient forever, creating learning opportunities at every bend, limiting television, reading all day long, and through it all we're to have a spotless home, with homemade dinners every night, and never behind laundry. That? Well, that standard is impossible, my friends.

That ideal makes the tired mom.



So I'm asking you to let go of this worldly ideal of motherhood. So often it's based on outward things -- appearances -- and loses the heart. You could have a beautiful home but miserable children. You could have little Einsteins, and yet they could be stressed. You could push and push yourself, but you end up exhausted.

Their hearts must come first.

When you start to mother thinking of their hearts first, the tired can begin to fade away. Being a mother becomes more about being aware and less about achieving the next mothering ideal. Now, listen, I'm not saying that it's bad to clean, or to cook healthy meals, or to have smart kids. No, those are all good things. But, not if pushing for perfection wears you out and dims your mothering spirit.

God made you to be the mom for your kids. Right now. Today.



If you're tired, let go of this ideal, and embrace being aware and present. Know that you are not alone. We mothers are all walking, are all running, this race together. Listen. The more we stop trying to compare and compete and look like we've got the perfect lives the less tired we will all become. Let us be about encouraging, building up, and loving each other. Motherhood is a journey, not a competition.

You can do it.

I absolutely know that you can.

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dear weary mom who needs a bit of encouragement

To you, the weary mother.

You, the mother, sitting on the side of your screen reading my words that I typed to you on a very, very, very cold night in Minnesota. It's the type of cold that sucks the breath right out of you as you race between the vehicle and your warm home. I know that because I was just out there and am still shivering from the subzero temperatures.

I'm writing right now to you.

You, the mother, with spit up stains on your shirt and toddlers yelling for you in the background and the noodles for macaroni overcooked and waiting for the pack of cheese to spread over them. You, the mother, with the newborn who has not had more than three hours of sleep a night with the baby that cries and cries and cries and doesn't like any of the 102 tricks found in the parenting article on newborns that you cut out before she was born. You, the mother, in whatever stage of being a mother you might find yourself in and yet there is this weariness that has settled in your heart like the cold outside my window.

I want to talk with you about your heart. Your dreams, your hopes, your worries when you put your head on your pillow at night wondering if all that you did today made a difference. You need to feel that bit of hope and energy and encouragement for today.

You.



Maybe you have a to-do list that is full, or done, or hasn't even been written because you don't like to write them. Maybe your kids are grown. Maybe you work out of the home or in the home or do a mixture of both. Maybe you wish you had a bigger house or that you had less stuff or that you could find a way to

manage it all. Maybe you have one kid or a dozen. Maybe you live where it is warm and not sub zero like me. Maybe you only eat organic. Maybe McDonalds is your weekly treat. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

All of those maybes don't really matter. What matters is you, you and what you do when you give of your heart to those children in your lives. After all, that is a great deal of motherhood - it's that giving and letting go and praying and wondering and pride and hope and not getting weary - all wrapped up in a day. And then it's this mix of chex cereal dumped out and crushed on the floor and diaper changes and car pool runs and homework stacks and dishes that were left behind the couch and you hoping that this is the day that you can sneak the shower in when the baby naps.

You see, no matter our differences in motherhood and what we do, you are unique and beautiful for your family. It's easy to start comparing and thinking that you should do things this way or that way or no way at all. But all that comparing does is chip away at the beautiful things that you do everyday.



Don't tell me those things don't matter.

Maybe you've forgotten how beautiful it is for your kids to spend an afternoon with you sitting by them coloring a picture with them. Or how great it was when they walk into the kitchen and there is a tray of chocolate chip cookies waiting - and yes premade store bought ones count - it's not about perfection it's simply the little things. Or how they love the kiss on their cheek goodnight as the lights are turned off. Or how sweet those minutes are spent on the couch reading a book for the tenth time or the first time that day. Or that you were smiling and saying *I'm glad to see you* when you picked them up from class.

Those little moments are beautiful moments in your children's lives. Those are moments that you are blessed to give to them. And yes, yes, you'll mess up. I mess up way too often. But - you and I - we don't need to sit in the muck of the hard day or the throw in the towel day or the day that feels boring and never ending you and I can persevere. Yes, persevere. Motherhood is a great deal of perseverance and belief that today, this day that you are blessed to have, doesn't have to be dependent on the days in the past.

You can do today. I believe in you.

Sometimes you just need a reminder of all you do.

You are amazing. Stop looking at the list with the incomplete checkmarks. Start looking at the check marks marking things off. Stop seeing where you think you fail and start seeing where you succeed.

You can learn from yesterday.

I do. I go to bed everyday hoping that I can be better the next. I lament the time where I was on the computer too much or where I was too short tempered or where I missed the moments with my children because I was too busy with what seemed to be urgent at the time. That, my friend, is the nature of life. You don't have it perfect. I don't have it perfect. Life and motherhood is a beautiful journey of learning and balancing and grace. And there is no perfect example of the perfect mother. Instead it is you and I trying again and again and again. It is of us whispering *I am sorry* when there is a mistake and tucking them in and saying *I love you no matter what*. It is you waking up in the morning telling yourself that *today is a going to be a good day* and trying.



You can do this today.

Brush off all the stuff holding you back - that stuff that makes your heart wonder about the value of what you really do. The *I can't do its*, the *I'm failing* words, the *weary sighs*, the *I don't measure ups*, and all of that stuff. Your kids don't really care about those words, remember. They just want you. Down on your knee or tiptoeing up looking them in the eyes and telling to them sweet words of *I love you* and *I am proud of you* and *I am blessed to be your mother*.

You are blessed. This day is within your grasp.

You can do it.

And I will do it with you.

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topics for speaking engagements

I've been blessed to speak in various locations around the country. I love the opportunity to share my heart, to offer encouragement, to laugh, and to embrace motherhood. I speak on a variety of topics including these:

Dear Mom Who Feels Like She is Failing.

Based on the Dear Mom letter with over 50k fb likes this keynote is aimed at looking at the thoughts that makes us feel like we are failing, and then offers real advice on how to let go of those worries and how to embrace motherhood. A highly inspirational, encouraging, and motivating keynote this is one that will leave you feeling that motherhood truly matters.

Living a Loving the Little Things Life.

Motherhood is an exercise in the busy. From running errands, to keeping up the house, to dealing with disputes, to bills, to all the expectations of the world often moms can go to bed at night feeling like what they are doing doesn't matter and doesn't make a difference. In this keynote we will learn to slow down a bit and to develop practical ways to begin to see the little things, the moments in life that truly matter.

10 Ways to be an Intentional Parent.

Based off the Ten Days of Intentional Parenting series on Finding Joy, in this keynote Rachel describes the value of intentional parenting, defines what intentional parenting is, and lists ten ways to be an intentional parent. This topic is full of practical and motivating advice that is designed to strengthen the relationship between parent and child.

Myths and Facts about Intentional Motherhood.

Often when one hears the word intentional parenting they think that their entire day is spent at their child's beck and call. This keynote is designed to unearth the myths of intentional parenting - like every moment is incredible and to highlight the facts - the importance of listening. This session will leave you inspired to look at your own parenting journey and to provide encouragement that you too can parent intentionally.

Why Vacuuming Should Always be Beautiful.

Sometimes we don't appreciate the gift of normal until it is gone. In this keynote Rachel describes in detail the beauty of normal. Often we move through life so fast that we forget to be grateful for the normal days in our lives. This is a highly inspirational keynote celebrating motherhood, celebrating the beauty of the everyday, and is designed to encourage mothers to be thankful for today, to hold their head high for all they do.

Raising a Child Gluten Free in a Gluten Full World.

In the winter of 2011 Rachel's youngest son Samuel was diagnosed with Celiac Disease at 15 months old. She's learned the struggles of raising a child in a world that is saturated with gluten food. In this keynote Rachel tells the story of Samuel's diagnosis, relates her personal story, and shares practical advice to making gluten free living normal. Highly inspirational and very motivating Rachel encourages others to focus on all the can have and not on what they cannot.