



MAKE LEMONADE

STAY PRESENT MAMAS
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Chapter 3:

Reclaim Joy

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This section is titled “Reclaim Joy”

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Make Lemonade: Resist Crisis Mode, Redeem Stress, and Reclaim Your Joy

Make Lemonade

Movie night is a big deal in my house. Our kids snuggle up with mom and dad on the couch with popcorn and blankets. We have a bad habit of making a huge mess that we don't clean up till the next morning, because we all need the movie night. After a long week of work and school and managing the house, the act of being present together is like one big family exhale.

Until one little brother decides to swipe the remote.

For several months, when my son was 4 years old, he would swipe the remote during that sacred ritual of the family movie. As stealthy as a super-spy, he would sneak his little hands over to whatever crack of the couch that the remote had fallen into. With a swish and a click, he'd press pause (or, heaven forbid, turn the power off!) and run down the hallway, holding the remote hostage.

You could feel the change in the room. We'd shift from relaxed to outraged in an instant. My attention-hungry son fed off of the power-trip, his laughter echoing across the house. Everyone else saw his joke as a cruel interruption.

Have you ever had a similar moment? Everything feels right with the world for a smidgeon of a second, and then something—or someone—comes along and ruins the moment?

Or maybe that kind of settledness is a foreign concept. Every hour of every day wreaks havoc on your serenity. The ideas of rest, joy, or peace are distant daydreams. You think, “if I can just get through this season, then I'll get where I want to be.”

There's a phrase on the rise in social media to describe this called “Depleted Mother Syndrome”. Although it isn't an official diagnosis, it is an accurate description of a very real burn out moms are facing. For those of us who don't even have genuine crises on top of every day motherhood, my friend calls it “blessings management”. It is the overwhelm you feel when you have everything you've ever prayed for, and yet the work of managing it/them all leaves you listless.

Like my kids' reaction at the movie interruption, we snap with aggravation. It seems our joy and contentment snaps right along with us.

Control vs. Motherhood

Why are moms in particular so quick to experience depletion and burn-out? I think it is because motherhood is one of the rare endeavors in which you have no control. An article on BetterHealth.com titled, *My Life Is Great, So Why Am I Not Happy?* says “Research suggests that our overall happiness with life may be strongly associated with our satisfaction with and quality of life... There is also evidence of a correlation between the amount of control we feel in our lives and how content we are.”¹

Think about it: throughout much of your life, you have experienced a measure of control over how things turn out. In school you could study hard to get good grades. In the workplace, you know you can get a paycheck if you show up on time and do the job. You might even be able to earn a raise if you put in extra effort. You may not be able to control your relationships per se, but you can set boundaries or put yourself out there to build new friendships. Through it all, you measure drops in your contentment and address the issue to restore your sense of satisfaction. You take control.

But motherhood doesn't come with any guarantee. You apply all the strategies and your baby still doesn't sleep through the night. You research nutrition and your child still has behavior problems. You reject a social trend like gentle-parenting or free-range parenting and later find you have over-corrected and are now dealing with other issues in your child's development.

Control and motherhood are oil and water. However, as research suggests, we still let our sense of control, or lack of it, dictate how we feel about being moms.

It can feel like life swiped the remote and pressed “pause” on contentment. Like my kids, we respond with exasperation. As author & podcaster Emily Jensen says, “Facing a less-than-ideal version of motherhood leads me down several paths, but it's usually not the path of joy.

¹ <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/happiness/my-life-is-great-so-why-cant-i-be-happy/>

I'm tempted to lose hope and get cynical or crabby. I start to focus more on what I don't have instead of enjoying what I do."²

It can feel like the joy's been hijacked right out of motherhood.

I'm Not Where I Thought I'd Be.

I feel the frustration of "Depleted Mother Syndrome" weekly, sometimes hourly. One day really stands out though. My youngest daughter had just turned 9 months old; it was supposed to be a day of sweet celebration. I scooped her up for a "9 months in/9 months out" picture that I was planning to post on instagram, side-by-side with the last picture of my pregnancy. But the image did not turn out like I had hoped. That day I wrote in my journal:

"Today feels a little bit like someone swiped the remote to my body, like I am paused in the postpartum zone. Physically, I am nowhere near where I'd hoped to be. I thought I had fully recovered from the bodily trauma of surgical birth. But the mirror says otherwise. I carry bloat and out-of-proportion weight in my middle like my baby was born yesterday. Day after day, as I wake up with a strain in my lower back. Shouldn't I be stronger by now? ...

"It's not just my physical body that feels stuck. Emotionally, I feel like I can't move forward. Every day, I buckle under the smallest of stressors. My brain probably has just as many stretch marks as my belly—I can't even finish my own sentences. Why am I still carrying so much extra weight—both in my heart and on my body? I don't feel like *me* most days."

Writing the words out helped me sort out my frustration. The end of that day, I wrote: "I'm not where I thought I'd be by now, but I refuse to let it steal my joy."

² <https://www.risenmotherhood.com/articles/joy-why-motherhood-doesnt-have-to-be-ideal-to-have-joy>

Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart

The Bible has a lot to say about joy. One Hebrew word for joy is *śimhâ* (pronounced *sim-khaw*). It means gladness, pleasure, glee, and happiness. We find this word in several places in Scripture:

- “You have put more **joy** in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound. I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, Lord, make me live in safety.” (Psalms 4:7-8 CSB)
- “You give him blessings forever; you cheer him with **joy** in your presence. For the king relies on the Lord; through the faithful love of the Most High he is not shaken.” (Psalms 21:6-7 CSB)
- “You turned my lament into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with **gladness**, so that I can sing to you and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.” (Psalms 30:11-12 CSB)
- “The hope of the righteous is **joy**, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.” (Proverbs 10:28 CSB)

(All emphases mine)

Other words for joy included *blessed*, *happy*, *glad*, and *content*. In Nehemiah 8:10, we learn that “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Joy as strength is not a new theme for us. Recall the truth that you can do all things (experience contentment & joy) through Christ who *strengthens* you. (Philippians 4:12-13)

God’s word also tells us where to find our joy: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11 ESV) Joy found in God’s presence is that same word “*śimhâ*”.

This is completely opposite from the world’s understanding of joy. It is not dependent on our circumstances or perceived control. No, we must find our strength for this life in the joy of the Lord; we can only acquire joy by entering in the presence of the Lord.

If it is such a simple equation, why are we all stuck in the sourness of joyless motherhood?

Does Control = Joy?

Theodore Roosevelt is accredited with the quote “comparison is the thief of joy.” While I see the dangers of comparison, I would argue that a *need for control* is the true thief.

When it comes to the cosmic war against joy, the enemy uses both. In the very beginning, Satan used comparison to fuel Eve’s need for control. And we have fallen for the same trap ever since.

We see the story in Genesis 3. To set the stage, Adam and Eve are living in perfect relationship with their Creator. In this garden, joy is their birthright. They are innocent and holy, which gives them the right to be in the presence of God. And in His presence, they have perfect joy.

Along comes Satan in the form of a serpent. We often say he tempted Eve to eat forbidden fruit, but what Satan actually tempted Eve with was to compare herself to God. From that place of comparison, she desired to take control of her life. That is what the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was all about: determining right and wrong.

In the Serpent’s own words: “‘In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” (Genesis 3:5-6 CSB)

Satan knew how to hijack Eve’s joy—get her away from the presence of God. Eve’s desire for control stole her satisfaction. It robbed her of relationship with God and removed her from His presence.

Even research agrees with the Bible here: that same need for control steals the joy out of motherhood. Do any of these scenarios sound familiar to you?

- You are hosting your first play date with a fellow mom of a toddler. When her little Billy start fighting over your child’s toy, you feel compelled to jump up and mediate right away. You struggle to hide your annoyance when your friend casually refills her coffee cup,

suggesting they “work it out themselves”. Play dates aren’t the joyful connection you hoped they’d be and you aren’t sure you want to do it again.

- Your spouse suggests moving baby out of the bedroom. He says you need more mental space to feel like his hot and sexy bride again. Frustrated by feeling pressured, you mutter something about waiting for your body to bounce back, and turn to snuggle 6-month-old Sally through the night. You have no doubt your baby loves your body, but you doubt your partner will be so enamored. His invitation seemed to suck the joy right out of the room.

- At his preschool graduation, your perfectly dressed Donovan belches out loud and proud in front of everyone. You are so embarrassed by lil’ D’s behavior you can’t enjoy the program. You squirm in your seat until the ceremony ends then drag him by his trendy little suspenders out the door and into the car where you can both hide from the sideways glances you dread.

Trying to control these circumstances rarely provides the sense of security we crave. In the striving, we miss out on the joy of being present with our people.

Our need for control is not just about relationships either. It also affects inner joy as we mentally juggle all the things. Here’s what clinical health psychologist Amy Sullivan, PsyD says about it:

“Holding your to-do list in your head is exhausting... the act of managing all of these tasks can be overwhelming, leading to burnout,” Dr. Sullivan states. “All that juggling and those mental exercises — and the guilt from not doing it perfectly — results in women experiencing burnout.”³

What Dr. Sullivan describes is the expectation that we must “be like God” in order to experience satisfaction. Either you are joyless from spending all your energy managing your family or you are joyless from the guilt of failing at that goal.

Recall from *Chapter 1: Resist Crisis Mode* that Jesus calls Satan thief whose goal is to “steal, kill, and destroy.” (John 10:10) Every day, he temps us with the **lie that control leads**

³ <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/depleted-mother-syndrome-and-mom-burnout>

to joy. Believing that lie leads us away from God's presence and into a place of striving. Away from God's presence, we must strive to "be like God" to claim joy. This backfires every time, leaving mamas with "depleted mother syndrome".

Repent to Reclaim Joy

Whether your joy was stolen suddenly or you simply let it slip through your fingers a little at a time, by God's grace you can reclaim the joy that's been lost in 2 simple steps: repent and remember.

First, you must **repent of Finding Joy outside of Christ**. This first step is acknowledging that your "Depleted Mother Syndrome" might actually be "Detached-From-The-Father Syndrome". You have believed a lie that you should control your own life. This lie took you away from the source of joy: the presence of the Lord. Maintaining your efforts to be "like God" in your life is a vicious cycle: you desire joy and contentment, turn to control (and away from God) to achieve it, and therefore walk further away from His presence where strength is found.

This cycle will always fall short. What's worse: the Devil knows that if he can steal your joy, he can zap strength.

"Detached-From-The-Father Syndrome" is characterized by sin, busyness, distraction, pride, shame, and criticism of others. And it's not how God designed motherhood to function!

Thankfully, God made a way to heal our detachment from the Lord and therefore restore our joy. He sent His Son to heal our attachment disorder. During the last supper, Jesus made a promise about joy to his disciples. He said,

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full...and no one will take your joy from you." (John 15:5, 11; 16:22 ESV)

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Shortly after these words, Jesus went to the cross to pay the cost for our joy to be secure. He was crucified, absorbing the sin and rebellion of anyone who would trust in Him as Savior—including us today.

Eve detached from the Father at one tree. Jesus made a way for us to return to the Father at another: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)

He then rose from the grave 3 days later, proving he has the power over death and detachment from the Father. The resurrected Christ is the keeper of all joy!

When you are healed from “Detached-From-The-Father Syndrome”, you will experience more joy and satisfaction than you can imagine.

This joy cannot be achieved, it must be received. In other words, we cannot make our own lemonade. When life gives us lemons, we must bring them to the feet of Christ and trust him to provide something refreshing in return.

This is the “how” behind God’s command for us to take joy in all circumstances, including in suffering. He doesn’t expect us to conjure up joy or manage our situations expertly to provide our own satisfaction. God simply invites us to come into his presence, depend on His goodness, and relax in His love.

I am the Joy of Christ

Recap: the first step is repentance. The second step to reclaiming joy is to remember who you are!

Have you noticed how often the theme of forgotten identity colors our favorite movies? From *The Lion King* to *Star Wars*, and *Moana* to *The Bourne Identity Series*, this theme deeply resonates with the human experience. I believe it is because we are all searching for our birthright to joy again—God’s design for us to be with him.

Sin stole not just your joy, but also your identity.

Trusting in Jesus for salvation restores that identity—you are now a child of God. But it takes constant re-alignment with the truth to remember this about yourself. Hebrews 12:2 says “For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2 CSB) The joy set before Jesus was the chance to have you restored to the Father again. That is the only thing Jesus gained that He didn’t have before the cross.

On the days you feel like joy is elusive, remember that the woman in the mirror is the joy of Christ. His Word says, “He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17 CSB) This verse features 3 different Hebrew words for joy, but they all mean the same thing—your Father is crazy about you! Just as we can love because He first loved us⁴, we can experience joy because He first took joy in us!

Let Them

When you return to the presence of the Father and you remember your true identity as the joy of Christ—daughter of the king—you can live with joyful dignity. You know what people with dignity do? They don’t freak out when they are interrupted.

On those nights when my son would pause the family movie, I told my kids to just laugh it off. Sure, they didn’t get the joke, but it didn’t matter because the movie wasn’t going anywhere. We try to apply the “let them” mindset hack: when someone in life gives you lemons, let them. You cannot control every situation, so why not practicing letting go?

Similarly, in motherhood I am learning to laugh when my expectations are interrupted. I don’t have to find a life-remote and fumble with the play button. This doesn’t mean I become a doormat to my trials, but I also “let them” exist without affecting my joy. By staying present with Jesus, I gain the strength that enables me to be joyful and confident in all circumstances,

⁴ “We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19 CSB <https://bible.com/bible/1713/1jn.4.19.CSB>

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even in pause mode. I remind my kids: the movie is always there. I have to also remind myself: the joy is always there.

There's a Proverb that describes this: "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come." (Proverb 31:25) Or in the familiar words of Paul:

"... I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)

Laughter is a form of expressing joy; it's what the Bible calls *rejoicing*. The times that feel out of control are opportunities to rejoice—laugh and let loose a little. Control is not the goal, being in God's presence is. After all, life should not be all administration and no adrenaline. So let yourself "laugh it off".

And on the days those life-lemons drive you to tears, remember "Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest." (Psalms 126:5-6 NLT)

Squeeze the Day:

PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Do you have weekly movie nights or game nights? Share one way you relax and engage with your family.
2. What triggers “Depleted Mother Syndrome” for you?
3. Name one way you can repent of “Detached-From-The-Father Syndrome” and return to staying present with Jesus?

SCRIPTURE:

Read Genesis 3. What other themes of control do you spot? How does God provide a way back for humanity through Eve into God’s presence again? Now read 1 Timothy 2:13-15. This is an often mis-interpreted scripture used to dominate women. God is *not* saying a woman’s salvation hinges on her willingness to be a housewife (that would contradict the entire rest of the Bible). However, it is about *Eve* being restored or “saved” through childbearing. What a reason to rejoice! God’s plan to invite humanity back into his presence directly depended on Eve bearing children, and women to do the same for generations so the Messiah would eventually be born to save the world! Thank you Lord for inviting women to be a part of your rescue mission story!

LISTEN TO:

Can’t Steal My Joy by Josiah Queen and Brandon Lake

Joy (What the World Calls Foolish) by Gateway Worship and Martin Smith