

Moms Are People, Too

Making time for yourself could be the best thing you do for your kids
by Lisa Johnson with Elisa Morgan, M.Div.

My husband, three sons, and I were in the midst of a family meeting. We were talking about me going back to school for a psychology degree when my teenager said, "I just can't see you as a psychologist. You're my mom."

Hmmm. I am indeed a mom, a distinction I carry with the utmost pride and satisfaction. However. . .

I seem to recall a time in my life when I read books with three-syllable words, enjoyed non-animated movies with friends, and wrote plays featuring real people, not talking teeth. I had hobbies, goals, and personal time that involved more than going potty by myself (not to mention never using the word "potty"). Did my kids know there was more to me than my ability to create a meal from bread crusts and instant oatmeal?

In their book, *Boundaries* (Zondervan), Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend write that we do a disservice to our kids when all they see is Mom being a mom. They learn that all there is in life is either being a parent or being served by a parent. It's important that they see Mom having time with friends, pursuing a personal interest of some kind, nurturing herself.

Their words were part of the reason I decided to "nurture" myself and finish my degree once our boys were in school. For the first three months, it was perfect. Then I discovered that I was expecting the absolutely unexpected: our fourth child. Charli came along in August, right at the halfway point to graduation. After a two-and-a-half-month "break," I hauled my sleep-deprived body back to class. How in the world would I be able to wrap my weary brain around a textbook when all I'd been reading for the past two months was *The Mother's Guide to Breastfeeding*?

But I was certain that God had led me down this road and would carry me through the journey. Not that it was easy. Many times I sat down at the computer to construct an essay on the functions of the brain while my own felt like the mush in the bottom of Charli's cereal bowl.

But when each paper was finished, I sat back and reveled in the satisfaction of a project completed. I loved being able to discourse on some non-baby-related topics over dinner. My appreciation for my family grew deeper, and the reality of life beyond colic renewed my energies and my creativity. My entire family reaped the benefits of me keeping something for myself.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find a specific exhortation, "You who art a mother, thou shalt keep something for thyself." We do, however, find that the model mom in Proverbs 31 embodies that ideal. A "virtuous woman" is one who directly cares for her family (v.15), but she is also one who enjoys using her gifts outside the home (v. 16, 18, 20, 24). And get this, her hubby and kids think she's pretty awesome (v. 28). Scripture makes room for a woman to get out there and exercise her God-given gifts, not just those that find their expression in motherhood.

Whether you're yearning to go back to school, to spend time painting, or to grab a weekly cup of coffee with a good friend, it's essential to remember that our longing for time to ourselves is part of who God created us to be. Spending time exploring the desires God has placed in us isn't a luxury. It's part of developing our own interests and growing into more fulfilled people, and therefore happier moms. And it serves as a healthy reminder to our children that moms are people, too.

A Note from Elisa: Dear Mom, At MOPS, we often say that a mother can sometimes feel like a juice box; everyone around her is sticking straws into her and sucking away until she is sucked dry. Too often we allow others unlimited access to our "juice box," believing that it's kinder, more loving, and even more God-like to always put others before ourselves. Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, not instead of ourselves. You have to love yourself in order to stay filled up with love for others. It's how you make sure you have enough of yourself on hand to give to your family.

Lisa Johnson is a writer, speaker, and recording artist from SouthernCalifornia. Learn more about her at www.candykissesmuddyhugs.com.

Elisa Morgan is president of MOPS International. Call (800) 929-1287 for information about a MOPS group in your area.

