

The Church of the Good Shepherd

Nursery Moms Brunch 2011

“What I Am Learning As A Parent” by Julie Johnson

1. Every person and therefore every child has sin.

Of course, I have known this since I was a little girl, but it has taken me 4 children to fully come to terms with it. I was a teacher, and worked as a babysitter and camp counselor from the time I was 12. I was confident about the kind of kids I would have. I knew that I would be able to “train” my children to be kind and generous, great people, great students, community leaders, and model Christians. My children, of course, would “sin” – you know, a lie here, a hit there - but I would quickly and effectively discipline them and deal with the offense. I was not prepared for a family – parents and children alike - wracked with selfishness and struggle. Sin is under each struggle and living life closely with others brings much of it to light. One particularly horrible day, my daughter yelled out, “I hate sin!” to which my son replied, “Yeah, it’s a good thing there’s Jesus.” Though both words were spoken in frustration, the truth hit home. We are desperate for Jesus each day – what a relief this is to my “pick yourself up and fix it” soul. We both need him and *have* him every day.

2. No child or parent has it all together.

This goes along with my first point. Again, we all say we know this, but do we really believe it? Resist the temptation to compare yourself, your children, and your family to others. God has given you the unique personalities, joys, and struggles that make up your family. You are not *supposed* to look like any other family. He is most glorified when we live our lives in Him as He has created us to be and to encourage other families to do likewise. We look at others and find ourselves believing that “*they* would never yell the way I just did, act like such a hypocrite or say the horrible things that just came out of my mouth. Or *their* child would never get sent to the principle, kick their mother, or strip naked, overflow the whirlpool tub, and spray shampoo and lotion all over the very nice master bathroom of a hostess while her unsuspecting mother has a Bible study luncheon downstairs!”

We want to have it all together, though, don’t we? When we share struggles we avoid their depth or only share “acceptable” struggles. Don’t you secretly want to have the children who say, “yes ma’am,” share with the other kids, listen to their teachers, and sit quietly and reverently at church so that others will notice how sweet they are and how good of a parent and how godly of a family you must be? I know that I have been guilty of both desiring and trying to contribute to this lie. Discouragement and competition flourish when we find ourselves comparing. This leads to guilt and frustration when we don’t measure up and pride and judgment when we do.

3. Results often take a long time.

A wise mother told me this when my oldest two were preschoolers and I was exasperated with battling the same issues over and over with little to show for my efforts. Children do learn from all of that correction – eventually. The “biter” will not always be the biter, they will some day say “please” and “thank you” without being prompted (I hope), and the rivalry will ebb and flow. In fact, everything will ebb and flow (remember this the next time you “ebb” as a “flow” will come along soon enough). Do not, however, expect to “make it” in any sense. There will always be something and each child has his own “something” too. Learn to sit in the something. We were created to be completely dependent on God – He is too merciful to allow us to live otherwise.

4. Enjoy your children.

Yes, there are practical things that must be done but please give your children your time. I am still at a stage with my children where kind, older parents often approach me and remind me that they will grow up in the blink of an eye. This past year, as I have tried to will that my youngest remain a baby, I am realizing it for myself. The time you have with your children is fleeting. Enjoy them (or don't enjoy them – not every stage is enjoyable) but give them YOU. Live in the present with them. Look in their eyes when they talk, hug them, listen to them. I am preaching to myself here – do not busy yourself with the things that go into life and parenting, the new blog or book that is full of great ideas, the floor that needs to be cleaned, the computer that you need to check. A dear friend has often reminded me that Jesus always chose people. Choose your children whenever you can.

5. Parenting is very important, but is not *the* ultimate task of your life.

Our culture tends to glorify the process of parenting and its ability to make or break our children. Parenting is not ultimately about our failure or success – thankfully the lens is much grander and our identity much more secure. Parenting is only a part of the greater context of our lives in Jesus. There are certainly techniques that are helpful and philosophies that you will adopt, but Satan would love for us to get caught up in the methods, ideas, checklists, and conversations about parenting. I fail at this so often. I am like my son who thrills at the planning of play – designing the rules to a game, brainstorming ideas, planning out strategy, making lists, building the infrastructure – that the actual game is of little interest. What I really need is not a new chart, method, or technique. In number four I pointed you toward your children – to choose people over the process – which is important. However, even your children are not the real “game”. They are not the end goal, though I am so often tempted to live as if they are. The end is really Jesus. He is what we *really* need.

6. Be ready to let go of any and all agendas.

I am not just talking about the plans you have for the day or week – though anyone with a baby knows that you have to hold these loosely as well. I am talking about your big and little plans – those unspoken expectations or ideas you have for your child, your family, and your life. Many of these might not even be labeled as plans or expectations – they simply fit into our cultural ideals. A school, a certain degree of health or standard of living, a certain neighborhood or house, a certain job or family routine, even a job or house at all. Many are good things. Safe things. However, we are so quickly fooled into

thinking that this is where life is. Life is most safe, full, and real when we are willing to let go of everything and walk where Jesus leads us. This sounds dreamy or abstract, but it doesn't have to be. It involves slowing down and living with him day by day, moment by moment. We so often live as if Jesus is the means to our life, but as I mentioned earlier, our life – including our parenting – is the means. Jesus is the end.

7. You will fail.

You will make your life about the stuff; you will not always choose your children. You will seek your own glory and compare yourself to others. If you are like me, these are not just pocket exceptions, but are constant battles. If you are at all like me, you will at times mess up so badly that you believe you have ruined your child's life, self-esteem, future, or even his or her relationship with the Lord. When you fail and are tempted toward discouragement, cling to the God who never fails. Constant failure is joy and freedom when it pushes me to depend on Jesus constantly. *It really is.* God knows that we are weak – He is our Creator who is great in His compassion and remembers that we are dust. He loves His children and their children so completely that it is also His joy and glory to make our messes beautiful and new. Jesus came for all of it – even the huge, unspoken mess that seems beyond hope or joy. God has covered you with His robe and put His ring on your finger. You are not defined by your failure or your success. Do you believe this? Do I really believe this? It is true.

8. You will succeed.

I know how much I need Jesus when everything is falling apart, but what about when everything is going well. During the good times my heart so quickly fills with pride. It amazes me how one day I am walking through Target humiliated and humbled by my screaming or disobedient children and the next day when I am back at Target to return the impulse buy I made the previous day I will pat myself on the back when my children are respectful and kind. When things are going well I am most likely to live apart from God – to see the good things in my life as a product of my own efforts, good parenting, my new “system,” my ability, hard work, patience, and even my worth. The temptation to define myself by success is as powerful as the temptation to define myself by my failure. I lose sight of the gospel – for myself and for others – and forget that all good is mine only out of sheer grace.

9. Jesus.

Just Jesus. I know this sounds trite or even impractical, but it isn't. If you hear nothing else today hear this. Parenting is what the Lord has for you now, but is just a piece of your life and relationship with Jesus. Spend time with him in His word. Daily and throughout the day remind yourself of who you now are in Him. Turn back to Him in joyful repentance – over and over and over - when you find yourself trusting in something else to give you meaning, pleasure, identity, or life. Recognize the temptation as a mother to look to your children for this. Live in the present with Jesus. When you find your mind worrying or wandering down the road tell yourself that Jesus will be there and look at Him with you *here*. He is here in line at the store, here changing a dirty diaper, here with sick children, and here with your cancelled plans, here while you help with homework, change the bed sheets in the middle of the night or nurse a baby. He is here with the devastating news or embarrassing episode, here while you push a stroller, discipline a child, or joyfully watch a tender moment between

siblings. Live in constant openness to Jesus. Depend on Him; orient yourself again and again as His. Find *real* life and freedom in Him.

Go to Jesus for your true rest. Be refreshed by his grace and adore Him because of it. See how He loves you! Sit in His love – I mean this truly, not just metaphorically. *Sit* with Him and remember His love on the cross. Soak Him in as your pleasure, joy, crown, and righteousness.

“Oh love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths it’s flow
May richer fuller be.”

George Mattheson