

Introduction: "I Can't Be a Mother Today"

Anxiety struck me immediately. It was too early to be up, but “too early” didn’t matter to my sweet little boy who was ready for the day the minute the sun shined through his bedroom window. My daughter Caroline needed milk and a new diaper, and all three of my little ones were, of course, hungry.

After forcing myself to sit up, I stared at the wall, then fell back down into my bed. I pulled my knees to my chest and the blanket over my head as tears came down and these words tumbled out to my God: “I can’t be a mother today, Lord, I’m just too tired.”

Getting awakened multiple times a night, every night, is enough to make anyone crash, but add the weight of having to function throughout the day in order to take care of a one-, two-, and four-year-old, and this mama was spent before the day began. Just knowing the strength and energy that would be required to make it through the day was enough to sway me to stay balled up

under warm covers. Serious sleep deprivation combined with the constant giving of myself, soothing cries, breaking up fights, training, disciplining, and trying to stay calm and gentle in the middle of it all was breaking me. I needed help. I so badly needed someone to call who could come and rescue me, just for one day. But that wasn't my reality.

My mom was ill and living in Florida, my mother-in-law had a full-time job, and there was no money to hire someone to help me out for a couple hours a month so I could get a break. My husband took over sometimes, but he was tired too, and we wanted weekends to be with each other. Plus, there was nowhere to go even if I could get out because money was tight; coffee at a coffee shop was a luxury out of my reach. It sounds like a lot of excuses, but the point is that I felt very alone, and very, very tired. Depression snuck up on me; there was a shell of a woman where I once was. My ideals, my hopes, my joy were snatched away before I had a chance to notice. Pleas for help aimed at heaven seemed to be met with silence. The message was clear: this was my life, and I needed to just deal with it.

Adjusting didn't go well. Anger and resentment were living just under my skin. Exhausted, out of my mind, and still hormonal, every day felt like a fight. Feelings of desperation were like an ever-present shadow over the good in my life. Experiencing hope in Jesus felt like chasing gold at the end of a rainbow . . . getting to it was always out of reach. Motherhood was something I planned for, something I wanted, so why was living it out so drastically different from my expectations?

Down to the bone, to the deepest part of my soul, is the love I have for my children. Every day of my life is imperfectly offered to them. But the little years, they're hard and oftentimes lonely. It's like a secret we fear sharing, just how life-altering motherhood is, especially when you don't have training or support. Let me pull

back the curtain on the idea that just because you love and are thankful to be a mother parenting will come easily or naturally. The lifetime commitment that is motherhood will, many days, stretch you beyond what you think you can handle.

We moms don't need an instruction manual. We need physical help.

If you're a mom of little ones and you don't have very much help, I know you're struggling to breathe. Your days morph into your nights and mornings come too quickly. You're bone-tired and would give just about anything for a break, a soul-filling, relaxing, *quiet* break. You need to be pampered. I've been there, and if it weren't for an unexpected gift, I'm not sure you'd be reading these words today. Let me share the gift with you.

Sally Clarkson was just the name on a book.

I knew *of* her because sitting on my bookshelf was one of her books. Her philosophies inspired me, and in her was a source of wisdom that my life longed for. She said yes when I asked her to speak at a conference I hosted. After the conference, Sally pursued me.

She would call me and tell me that the Lord had placed me on her heart. Insecurities led me to believe that she was just being nice and that eventually her calls would stop. But they didn't stop, and we began a friendship, one that still fills me with awe. How did I get a friend and mentor who cares for me this much? It's a grace-gift to be given a wise woman mentor, especially when you least expect it.

After several challenging and life-giving conversations, I decided to leave my home and go to Colorado to spend a week with Sally and her family. I had not been away from my babies for more than two days at a time, so this trip was one of faith, fear, and prayer. I didn't want to leave my family, but I knew Sally was going to give me something I needed to continue on as a mama;

she was going invest in my life as a Titus 2 woman, and she was going to pamper me.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3–5)

Being in Colorado changed me. It was there that I realized how desperate I was to breathe. The first night I was in Sally's home, I slowly got into a great-smelling bed (clean sheets!) that was all prepared for me, and I cozied down and stretched out knowing I would get a full night's sleep. I savored this moment of knowing that I was actually going to rest. As my head lay on the pillow, I inhaled deeply and exhaled with a smile. Rest. Quiet. I didn't know how much I needed Colorado, or Sally, or this perfect-smelling bed. But I did. And it was so, so good. Sally cared for me, nurtured me, took me out for a grand breakfast, and invited me to enter my life with a sense of beauty and thrill. Sally gave me the courage to go home and be a willing participant in my life.

Now here I am writing this book with my mentor and friend. When the first words to this book were typed, I was knee-deep in feelings of desperation. Writing this book has been therapy for me. Sally would read some of my writing and then say, "I think you're really depressed, let's talk about this." And we'd talk and she'd give me Scripture and wisdom. I worked out many of my struggles writing this book, and now I feel like I'm at the other end of a tunnel, breaking free into light. I'm in a new season. Wisdom is my companion, and leaning into God is my hope.

My youngest is three now and is sleeping through the night.

You know what this means, right? My nights have been filled with uninterrupted sleep! It is a glorious thing to experience a full night's sleep. Looking back on those desperate days, and looking at where I am now, I can confidently say, "*It gets better!*" If only I could have seen that during the hardest times, hope would have been so much easier to grasp.

Friends, fellow mamas, this book is for you.

Sally and I want to encourage you to keep going even when it feels like you can't, and we want to help you. We won't offer you formulas, but we will offer ideas, perspectives, transparency, and wisdom. We have some ideas for you in getting help, and we are making a plea for older women to remember the tired years and come alongside young mothers so that our children and our children's children will know how to serve and to receive help.

Thank you for giving us your precious, little time. We pray our offerings will not just comfort you but will refresh your soul and spur you on in hope! Do you have your coffee or tea? This time is for you. Let's begin, together.