



God doesn't call mothers to rule-following but to an intimate relationship with Him. *Motherhood without All the Rules* identifies the main "rules" moms today often feel pressured to follow and counters them with Gospel truth. Instead of being a good mom, learn how you can grow to become a holy mom.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

APPLE BOOKS 

AMAZON 

WALMART 

GOOGLE PLAY 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	9
INTRODUCTION: Dear Stressed-Out Mom	13
CHAPTER 1	19
Building a Kingdom of Mom	
CHAPTER 2	33
Stressful Standard: <i>Everything depends on you.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>God is the best parent.</i>	
CHAPTER 3	45
Stressful Standard: <i>You need an escape.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>God supplies exactly what you need.</i>	
CHAPTER 4	55
Stressful Standard: <i>You deserve it.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Your loving God disciplines you.</i>	
CHAPTER 5	69
Stressful Standard: <i>You do you.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Discover freedom through repentance.</i>	
CHAPTER 6	81
Stressful Standard: <i>You're a good mom.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Become more like Christ.</i>	
CHAPTER 7	93
Stressful Standard: <i>Be more than just a mom.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Find your life by losing it.</i>	

CHAPTER 8	103
Stressful Standard: <i>This is your only chance.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>God's grace can redeem your insufficiency and quiet your fear.</i>	
CHAPTER 9	113
Stressful Standard: <i>You don't have time for quiet time.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Intimacy with God is essential.</i>	
CHAPTER 10	129
Stressful Standard: <i>You're not supposed to be your kid's friend.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>Your children are your nearest neighbors.</i>	
CHAPTER 11	139
Stressful Standard: <i>Mom and Dad have to be on the same page.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>You can be united in your motivations despite your differences.</i>	
CHAPTER 12	151
Stressful Standard: <i>Image is everything.</i>	
Gospel Truth: <i>You are transformed from the inside out.</i>	
POSTSCRIPT	165
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	169
NOTES	171

CHAPTER 1

BUILDING A KINGDOM OF MOM

Shortly after I found out I was pregnant with my third son, a grandma at church pulled me aside and whispered conspiratorially: “Now you get to be queen.” At the time, I was confused. Would I not have been queen if I had a daughter? Was the goal of motherhood to be the queen?

A few years later I caught myself saying to my son, “I’m not your servant.” It’s a common enough saying, a quick retort to throw back at our kids when their needs become ridiculous, when they’re avoiding independence, or when they expect far more than we could possibly give them. But it reflected something deeper going on in my heart. I didn’t want to be the servant; I wanted to be the sovereign.¹

Mom, a title just above queen.

Every mom is a queen.

Thou shalt not try me. Mom 24:7

Cutesy sayings like these are all over Pinterest, printed on t-shirts for sale through Instagram ads, and painted on little wooden blocks at boutiques. Maybe you'd never buy one, but the idea of being a queen in charge of her world is definitely appealing. The world tells you to establish your own truth and prove yourself by your own power. If you are the ultimate authority, then your whole family benefits when you focus on meeting your needs first. You make the rules according to your opinions because mom knows best. Your children and husband should bow to your authority—why? *Because I'm the queen, that's why.*

The world invites you to take the best seat in the house. From where you sit on your throne, you can control nearly every detail of family life. You're the queen. You can govern your home, guarding your kingdom from such unspeakable disasters as too much television and unmade beds. Your children live under your ever-changing emotions and your constant stream of instructions. Your husband picks up your honey-do list and bends his knees to your meal plans. You create lists and rules, then manage your world to make them succeed. In short, you rule. Because everyone knows *if mom's not happy, no one is.*

Building your kingdom looks like freedom but quickly becomes a burden. Who can keep up with everything the world expects a mom to be? Who can bear the weight of being the one in control of your family's future? Who can manage a household, a job, and relationships with their children and still have time for self-care? As you build your kingdom according to the world, its rules for freedom become stressful standards that no one can attain.

With sovereignty comes great responsibility; the decisions of motherhood are endless and their weight feels astronomical. One wrong move and your kids will need hours of therapy to recover and live as normal human beings. The world pretends like it's all your personal choice, but one slip-up, and you're labeled a bad mom. Bad moms not only ruin their kids, but they have zero value as a person. Mess up and you may lose everything—your self-worth, your social standing, and your identity.

Of course, much of the pressure comes from the nearly constant influx of messages from the internet. The ever-changing expectations voiced by an endless stream of “experts” (and the momfluencer with 12K followers and the gingham filter for that perfect orange-y skin glow) makes it impossible to feel like you're succeeding at motherhood.

A recent study by Zero to Three, a nonprofit that supports early childhood development, found that 90 percent of moms feel judged and 46 percent feel like they're being judged almost all the time.² With the pressure of so many opinions, many moms choose to follow the rules simply to avoid censure.

I've bowed to rules I didn't feel conviction on more times than I realize. For years I bought my children organic snacks to eat when we were out in public and fed them the regular ones when we were at home. I felt no personal conviction on the organic/non-organic debate but was careful to stick to organic for park time and playdates to avoid the judgment of others. Remembering to use organic at the right times wasn't easy, and as my children grew older, I grew less concerned about the opinions of others, so I sometimes forgot to stock the organic snacks. One day, as I

packed my son's little fishies for lunch, I realized that because I was free from condemnation in Christ, I no longer needed to be a slave to what other people thought about my food choices.

But there is no freedom for a mom pulling the one-ton burden of her own kingdom around. God created us to work for His kingdom, not to build our own. We'd rather rule as sovereign in our little kingdom than submit to our sovereign God. We choose to follow the stressful standards of the world instead of experiencing the joy of living under God's righteous path. We prefer to maintain our role as the ultimate authority than to experience perfect parental love as a child of God. We like to work by our own insufficient power instead of living in reliant relationship with our Savior. We'd rather fix ourselves than respond to the Holy Spirit with true repentance.

We choose to follow the stressful standards of the world instead of experiencing the joy of following God's righteous path.

GRACE ISN'T EASY

God's path may be the best, but it certainly isn't the easiest. After coming out of the harrowing stage of my children's toddler years, I found myself slipping back into rule-keeping. I had emerged from the constant bombardment of needy children and life felt easier. I grew comfortable with my role as a mom and started choosing the path of least resistance: legalism. On the surface, grace seems easier than legalism. Grace is a free gift, after all, and receiving gifts isn't supposed to require any effort. But I've found accepting grace requires humility, and my prideful heart isn't always willing to take the hit.

My friend Jenna recently shared a story with me of unexpected and uncomfortable grace. While on vacation in small-town northern Minnesota, Jenna's parents (praise God for grandparents!) graciously sent Jenna and her husband on a breakfast date to a hidden gem hole-in-the-wall. As they dug into their greasy, fried breakfast treats, Jenna grew nervous. This diner was exactly the sort of place that proudly refuses to get with the times and take a credit card. When they confirmed with the waitress, their breakfast date became as uncomfortable as their creased red vinyl booth.

They had plenty of money to pay for this meal, but no way to access it. Venmo and PayPal couldn't help them here. Eating in a restaurant is supposed to be an equal transaction—you receive food and service and the restaurant receives your money. Instead of the balanced transaction they were expecting as they drove through the dense pine forests of northern Minnesota that morning, the waitress offered them grace. She told them to consider their meal paid in full.

Because of our prideful “do it yourself” mentality, we expect and find comfort in equal transactions. We don't like unpaid bills, favors from friends, and gifts we receive for no reason. Our pride wars against the imbalance of our relationship with a holy God. We owed a debt to God, and He paid it for us. Our sin on His perfect shoulders. Our weakness covered by His strength. Our failings redeemed by His amazing grace. We see the depths of the imbalance, and instead of accepting it and responding with a life full of worship, it becomes a problem for our pride. We long to repay God for the debt of our salvation but feel the weight of our inability, so we strive desperately to achieve balance through our

good works. We know we must offer up acts of great importance if we will have any chance to even the scale.

Doing motherhood “right”—whatever that looks like to you based on your background or the research you have studied or the kind of family you want to build—seems like the easiest way to repay our debt. Motherhood is hard work, full of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual effort and weighty with importance. Christian circles mistakenly call it our highest calling as women.³ With this overemphasis on motherhood, it becomes tempting to elevate our work as moms to something weighty enough to reimburse God for the gift of salvation rather than live with the discomfort of our own inability to be holy.

Titus 2:11–14 tells us how to do life—and motherhood—right:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We can, of course, do good works with the wrong motivation—hoping to repay our salvation or give ourselves the glory. Instead, Titus tells us that God’s grace sanctifies us as we fix our eyes on a greater hope—the “appearing of the glory of our great God

and Savior Jesus Christ” (2:13). God did not save us to make us perfect rule keepers who no longer need Him. Instead, salvation allows us to live in reliant relationship with a holy God. Do not stop working hard at motherhood—on the contrary, Titus says to be “zealous for good works” (2:14)—but be constant in prayer that God transforms your motives from your own glory to a deeper relationship with your glorious God.

RELATIONSHIP OVER RULES

This kind of dependence on God produces the growth I really long for in this season of motherhood. I want to be a holy mom who leads her kids to the cross in both word and deed. Being a good rule follower isn’t going to cut it. If I want to walk in holy motherhood, I must foster *an active reliance upon an intimate relationship with God*.

An intimate relationship begins with desire. Words like intimate and desire can make Christian women a little uncomfortable. If you’ve grown up in the church, you were taught that intimacy and desire were reserved for marriage, but we’ve gotten that backward. They aren’t words relegated to the bedroom but meant to bring us to the throne room.

Remember when you had a DTR (defining the relationship) talk with that cute boy, committed to officially dating, and wanted to be together every waking moment? Or when you first met your BFF and you planned the next semester’s class schedule so you could take all your gen eds together? Or when your baby first arrived and all she wanted was to be held and fed 24/7?

All our deepest human relationships begin with some sort of longing, but eventually there are seasons when that emotion is gone, and we must choose to work at nurturing the relationship despite how we feel.

Don't feel ashamed if your immediate reaction is that you rarely feel desire for God. I certainly go through seasons where I struggle to long after God in the midst of daily life. I know *what I want to want*, but my desire is lackluster. These are usually times when my gaze has been turned inward to my own needs or outward to a blessing I long for.

Every time I take my kids to Target, they plead for a trip down the toy aisle. They promise me that they just want to look, but they always end up begging for something. They will forget about most of these toys between the aisle and the checkout, but for one moment, they want them with all their heart. We shake our heads at a child's headstrong yearning, but the same is true for us: we hunger after the shiny new toy instead of enjoying the blessings we already have.

Our human tendency will always be to desire what looks valuable, exciting, and new. God is all these things, but the world is full of what will constantly entice us to turn our head. So we must diligently set the things of God before us. We need verse cards at the kitchen sink. We need worship music blaring. We need Sunday sermons and midweek Bible study. We need theologically rich podcasts in our ears as we fold laundry. We need Bibles lying open on kitchen counters until we can no longer walk past them. We must set God right in front of our face, because when we truly see God, we recognize that He is infinitely desirable.

An intimate relationship with God begins with desire but continues with knowledge. I was not a girl who developed crushes on boys very often. I had two older brothers, and my house was always filled with their friends. I knew too much about what boys were really like to be easily entranced. In high school I finally started liking boys. The initial feeling was great. That sweet rolling in my stomach when he smiled in my direction. My friends and I called it “the electric bowling ball,” but you probably know it as butterflies. But the initial desire always faded as I learned more about the boy, at least until I met one very TDH (tall, dark, and handsome) boy halfway through my senior year of high school . . . that’s another story for another time.

Knowing God is the opposite of all our teenage crushes. Both relationships begin with desire, but in our relationship with God the more we know about Him, the more our desire for Him grows instead of waning. Knowledge and desire are the friction and spark working together to build a burning, intimate relationship with God. If we want to experience God’s nearness, we must learn more about Him through studying the Bible and identifying His faithfulness in our lives.

My husband and I have been studying up on new vehicles to find the perfect one for me. After researching several choices, we think we’ve found “the one,” but for now we’re saving our nickels and waiting until our boys are just a little older (and less likely to stain or maim that beautiful leather upholstery I’m hoping for). I’m usually terrible at identifying the make and model (don’t ask me to define those terms), but now that I’ve found the vehicle I want, I see it everywhere. My eye is drawn to it on the freeway, the

carpool line, and the Target parking lot. I've spent time studying this car, and it's lead to admiration and happiness when I see it.

In the same way, if you study the lives of Abraham and Sarah, for example, and you identify how God was faithful to them even when they were faithless, the Holy Spirit will give you eyes to see where God is being faithful to you despite your unfaithfulness. You will more quickly come to God in confession and prayer because you know how He forgives and provides. Knowing God breeds intimacy with Him because He is a God who has always been intimately involved in the lives of His people.

An active reliance on an intimate relationship with God means that we admit we aren't strong enough to bear the weight of all the rules we take on. As spoken-word artist and author Jackie Hill Perry reminds us, "The reason any Christian is still a Christian is because Christ is keeping them. Don't be so haughty as to think that you still love God because you that type."⁴ After we pass through a season of survival where it is abundantly clear we are being kept by God, we cannot walk right back into living by our own strength. The countercultural truth of the gospel is the only path to the fruitfulness we are seeking.

Author Hannah Anderson explains this kind of path: "God responds to humility. He exalts those who humble themselves. This is the governing dynamic in God's upside-down kingdom: You go down in order to go up."⁵ When we find ourselves living by our own power, we must confess our sin of pride and self-sufficiency and pursue active reliance on God through prayer. Then the power of sin is broken, and our good works are transformed from an avenue for self-salvation into a path of fruitful obedience.

GROWING IN GODLINESS

Walking in intimacy with God takes practice before it becomes our default. My sons started tae kwon do last month, and shortly after they started, my youngest stopped. He refused to practice unless I was with him, so I am now a proud white belt tae kwon do student (I know, you're jealous). As we learn our moves, the instructor is always trying to shift our thinking. He shouts sayings like, "Practice makes . . ." and inevitably we all respond "perfect!" But he reminds us that perfection is impossible. Instead, he teaches us to respond, "Practice makes . . . habits!"

This is true not only of tae kwon do, but also of our ability to walk in intimacy with God. When we feel the lure to measure ourselves as mothers by the world's standards, we must practice the way of our God. As we practice learning to recognize God's work in our lives because we know how He works in the Bible, the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts to long after God more than our instinctual desires for comfort and glory. Practice does not only create habits; it is part of growing in holiness.

The world tells us that moms should practice gentle responses, yoga, internet research, self-care, and so much more. These are all good things, but they will not shape us into holy moms. Instead we must practice holiness, by the guidance of God's Word and the in-working of the Holy Spirit. One of the most encouraging verses I have clung to in motherhood is 2 Peter 1:3, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." What an essential promise for moms! God has given to us all we need to do life and do it with godliness through knowing Him.

Peter is offering us a heavy helping of grace, but the following verses turn toward our sanctification. The paragraph continues with a list of virtues to add to our faith in Christ.

For this reason, *make every effort* to supplement your **faith** with virtue, and **virtue** with knowledge, and **knowledge** with self-control, and **self-control** with steadfastness, and **steadfastness** with godliness, and **godliness** with brotherly affection, and **brotherly affection** with **love**.”
(2 Peter 1:5–7)

Because God gives us all the things we need for life and godliness, we are able to make every effort to grow in holiness by adopting practices that create space for those virtues to flourish in our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jackie Hill Perry says, “Being kept by God does not mean that you be lazy about the practice of sanctification.”⁶ So we don’t do “let go and let God”; instead, we say that *all things, including my hard mom work, are “from Him and through Him and to Him”* (Rom. 11:36).

We pursue holiness by following God’s good plan for our lives presented in the commands of Scripture. Holiness produces both transformation and fruit. “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). The last thing I want to be as a mom is an ineffective and unfruitful sovereign of my own kingdom. Grace is both the beginning of our salvation story and the ending. It permeates the middle portion and empowers our work for God’s kingdom, but we cannot

expect a harvest of righteousness without hard work. Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus made me his own” (Phil. 3:12).

What is the point of all this pressing on? Is it to meet the world’s standards for good motherhood? Is it to achieve the esteem of our friends? Is it for children that they will one day know God themselves? No, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). The prize isn’t the admiration of the world or the members of your small group. The prize isn’t Christian children. The prize isn’t perfect motherhood. The prize is a deeper relationship with God on earth, until one day we experience the glory of perfect fellowship with Him in heaven.

Dear Mom Burdened by Building Her Own Kingdom,

God will not allow you to continue running hard after your own kingdom. Through His work in your heart, you will be constantly reminded that only the work of the cross can produce righteousness in our motherhood. Only when you stop relying on the rules of your self-made kingdom and start relying on your relationship with God will you experience freedom while working hard for God’s glory. Then by the will of God the Father and the work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will move in your heart to produce the valuable fruit that is the foundation of godly motherhood.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

WALMART 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 
