

Mom Guilt

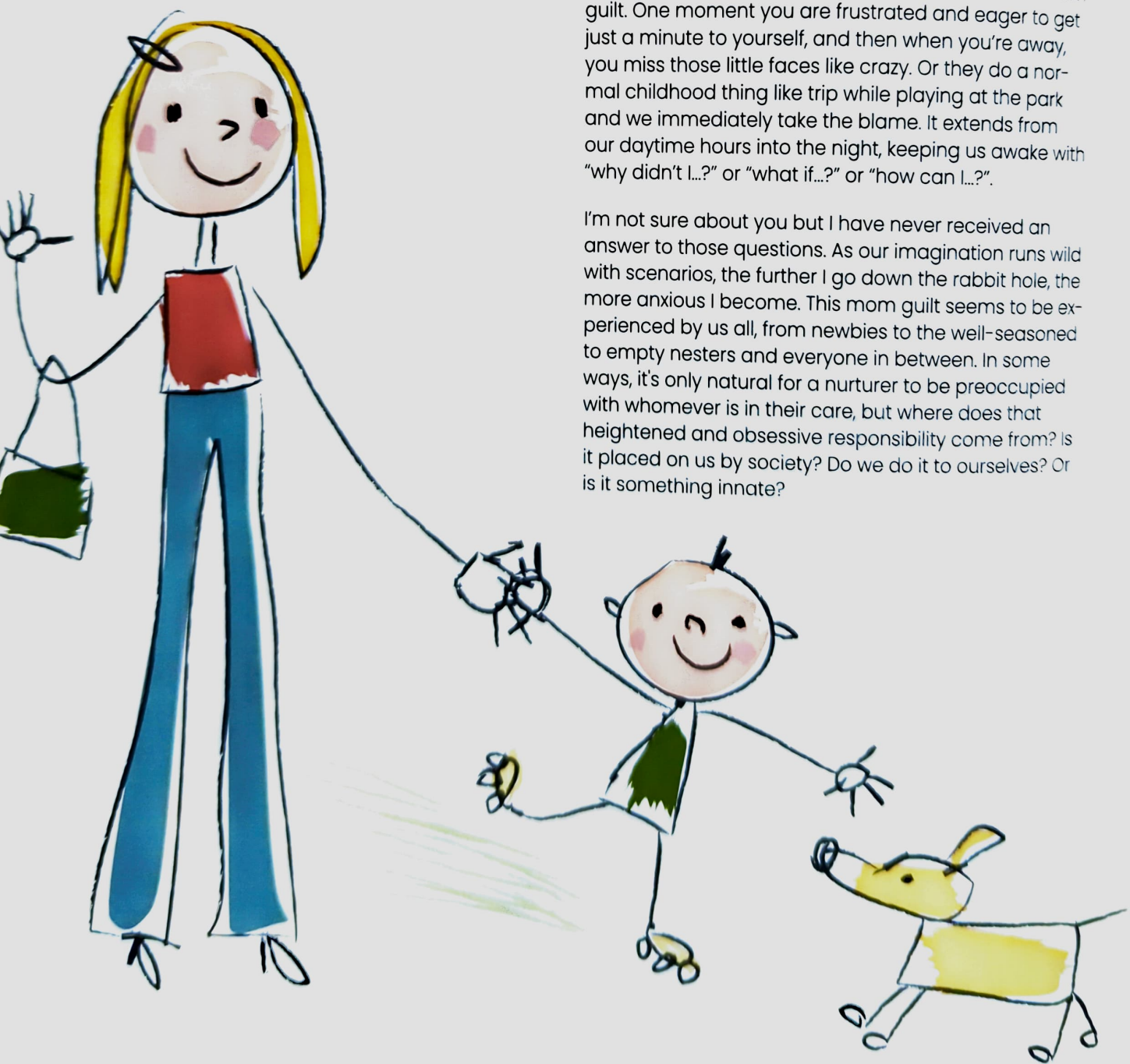
Letting go of control.

by Rachel Greening

We are headed to an emergency dentist for little miss who broke her two front teeth at the park today," my friend wrote, adding three crying emoji's. "She is okay. I was a wreck when it happened. I feel terrible! Please pray for us."

It's always there, isn't it? Our most faithful foe—the mom guilt. One moment you are frustrated and eager to get just a minute to yourself, and then when you're away, you miss those little faces like crazy. Or they do a normal childhood thing like trip while playing at the park and we immediately take the blame. It extends from our daytime hours into the night, keeping us awake with "why didn't I...?" or "what if...?" or "how can I...?".

I'm not sure about you but I have never received an answer to those questions. As our imagination runs wild with scenarios, the further I go down the rabbit hole, the more anxious I become. This mom guilt seems to be experienced by us all, from newbies to the well-seasoned to empty nesters and everyone in between. In some ways, it's only natural for a nurturer to be preoccupied with whomever is in their care, but where does that heightened and obsessive responsibility come from? Is it placed on us by society? Do we do it to ourselves? Or is it something innate?



Guilt is a natural emotion

It is rightly taught that for the believer, guilt is not from God. Guilt is from the enemy to distract and discourage us from living our best God-led life. The definition of guilt by *Psychology Today* explains that “guilt is a natural emotional response when one causes harm to another.” The experts explain that it can be helpful but “in excess, guilt may needlessly burden those who experience it.”

Can I get an amen?

Misplaced guilt is from the enemy, and conviction of sin is from Christ. However, it's all too easy to take this temptation at face value and not delve deeper into the roots of its deception. I feel guilty because I perceive that I have done something wrong or that I have harmed another. It is not against God's law to practice self-care or discipline your child. It is not against God's law for your child to fall or make a mistake and receive the natural consequences. So, if I'm not breaking God's law, what law am I breaking?

Breaking down the infraction

The law which we have broken is our own social contract—my personal ten commandments that I have created in my heart of what a mother should and should not do.

- I shall not raise my voice over a Mary Poppins approved level or my child will need therapy.
- I shall not be away for longer than an hour or the house will burn down.
- I shall not wait too long to start music lessons or my child will be behind.
- I shall not neglect Sunday school or my child will not become a Christian.

Have you seen the pattern? Each self-made “rule” is not only filled with the worst-case scenario, but holds one particularly large piece of misinformation: the outcome is a result of what we do or don't do. Let's say it together: *We are not in control.*

Turn the tables

It is a familiar lie that we tell ourselves and is as old as the Garden of Eden. The lie is that we can control our future through our actions.

- I cannot prevent a tornado from hitting my house. I can only prepare for it.
- I cannot prevent myself from feeling anger, but I can pray for the Holy Spirit's help to not act upon it.
- I cannot keep my children safe while I'm away, but I can put an adult in charge whom I trust.
- I cannot ensure my child will accept salvation, but I can model what a life in Christ looks like and preach the gospel in word and deed.

As mothers we plan and prep and pray and then, the only thing left, is to relinquish control. Let go. Holding onto it like a backseat driver will only complicate the situation. When we micro-manage, we are taking responsibility for something we have given to someone else. What we must drill into our bones is the truth that God is in control, and God is always good. I cannot manipulate circumstances or my children to bend to my will. If something veers off my mom-plan, it is not an automatic license to internally condemn myself to my self-made prison of guilt. So how do we go about breaking the cycle of misaligned expectations? We align ourselves with what God's Word has to say about it.

God's Word on Worry

The Bible has a lot to say about worry. The verse I cling to the most is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:6–8).

“You do what you are able, and the rest you leave to the mighty and powerful Creator God who loves them more than you can even fathom.”

Verse 6 and 8 get a lot of airtime, but it's that beautiful promise sandwiched in between that brings me the most comfort. *God's peace will guard me.* His peace will guard my mind against the infinite list of scenarios in which I fail and my kids suffer. He will guard my heart when I, in my human frailty, do inevitably fail my kids and they consequently suffer for it. But for that I need not feel guilt, for I am a flawed human striving to provide the best life that I can for the people He has put in my care.

You do what you are able, and the rest you leave to the mighty and powerful Creator God who loves them more than you can even fathom. Bring it all to Christ in prayer and leave it there at His feet. He has taken it from you. Now walk and live in the peace that comes from knowing you don't need to be in control because your always good heavenly Father is.

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