

# Enjoy Every Minute. Really?

The days are long, but the years are short. —Gretchen Rubin

When my daughters were little, I was repeatedly given the same advice. A more “experienced” mom who was a bit further along on the motherhood journey than I was (and usually a complete stranger) would see the girls and me at the library or shopping for groceries, and she would strike up a friendly conversation. “Oh, your girls are so cute! How old are they?” She’d ask my older daughter, “Do you like being a big sister? Are you Mommy’s big helper?” Then she would grow nostalgic and begin to reminisce about her own children, saying things like, “It seems like just yesterday my Susie was that little. Now she’s in college. . . .” And then I knew it was coming. I knew this mom was going to look me in the eye and say with all the conviction she could muster, “Enjoy every minute, because the time goes so fast!” And I’d think, I know, I know . . . it goes fast. At least that’s what everyone keeps telling me. But it doesn’t always feel like it’s going fast with long days and sometimes longer nights of feeding, burping, and changing babies. I’m picking out my produce in the same clothes I slept in, and I don’t remember the last time I got more than five straight hours of sleep.

One time a woman in an elevator saw my two daughters sitting very nicely in their double stroller and said, “Oh, it’s sooo easy when they are little like that! They listen to everything you say!” As she stepped off the elevator, I just stood there, frozen in time, thinking, If this is so easy then I am in so much trouble! I vowed then that I would never say such things to young moms.

Do you know who you will never hear giving this advice? Moms in the thick of it. You will not hear a mother with young children say, “Man, I don’t know what is going on, but the baby was up every hour crying last night. I think he’s cutting a tooth. And my three-year-old refuses to be potty trained. But you know what? I am enjoying every minute!” And you won’t hear a mother of teenagers say, “Yep—I’m enjoying every minute! Every eye roll, every sarcastic comment, every attitude my kid throws my way . . . I’m savoring every second!”

Fast forward several years: now I am one of the more “experienced” moms. My daughters are teenagers and young adults and sometimes I want to ask, “where has the time gone?” Recently, while looking at a family photo from over a decade ago, I glanced over at my husband and noticed he was wearing the same shirt as in the picture! I am reminded daily of how quickly time is passing as I keep track of the mileage in my car, notice that my daughter’s pants are too short (again), receive reminder calls from our dentist telling us that it’s time to get our teeth cleaned, and hear the sound of my coffee maker automatically shutting off in the morning when I haven’t even finished my first cup. Our mailbox is flooded with college brochures addressed to our youngest daughter, and I am still not used to her older sisters being gone.

I get it. I understand why people feel the need to point out that our children go from preschool to college in the blink of an eye. With several milestones in the rearview mirror, I agree that the years do go incredibly fast. But the moments that make up the days that make up the months that make up those years can go tiresomely slow. Motherhood is a long, sometimes lonely, road.

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.  
As they pass through the Valley of Baka (weeping), they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion."  
(Psalm 84:5-7)

The pilgrims in this text were most likely traveling --some from very far away--to Jerusalem to worship. The word "pilgrimage" in this context refers to a long trip with a spiritual significance. That is a pretty good definition of motherhood if you ask me.

Travel in biblical times, and even a hundred years ago, was unpredictable and sometimes dangerous. Travelers did not have our current modes of transportation or the modern-day conveniences we enjoy today. They could not make reservations ahead of time. They did not have the luxuries of GPS, online reviews, and weather apps. Think about Mary and Joseph, arriving in Bethlehem and finding no room in any of the inns. If only they'd had a reservation and confirmation number!

These travelers are blessed (some translations use the word happy) because their strength is in God and their hearts are "set on pilgrimage." This little phrase captivates me. When we set our hearts on something there is a deep desire—a willingness—to go after it and make sacrifices for what we want and what matters to us. We might say, "she has her heart set on that university because they have the best nursing program in the Midwest." Or, "he has had his heart set on that cute redhead ever since he was twelve years old." When we approach parenting with our hearts set on pilgrimage, we walk with purpose. We are intentional and determined. Rather than being short sighted, we hold the long view, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Pioneer Jesus teaches us how to set our sights on something bigger than what we can see right in front of us.

When we set our hearts on pilgrimage, there is also an awareness that the journey is long, which produces patience in us. It gives us the perspective we need and helps us to "zoom the lens out." One of my favorite features of my smartphone is the ability to "zoom in" with my fingers—to make words and people's faces larger—so I can see the details with clarity. Sometimes in our daily lives, however, when we zoom in and focus on every detail of the moment (especially the hard moments), we lose sight of the bigger picture. When we live with an awareness that motherhood is a long walk, it's like zooming the lens back out. We realize everything doesn't need to get done or fixed or figured out today. We can trust God to lead us, one step at a time.

And finally, when our hearts are set on pilgrimage, there is an expectation that our journey will take us through hills and valleys and will include both smooth and rocky terrain. No one gets an easy, problem-free journey. Regardless of what we see on social media, nobody's life is picture-perfect. We all face challenges, seasons of joy and seasons of weeping, and we will not enjoy every bend of the path. Adjusting our expectations produces perseverance in us. Most of the challenges we face are temporary; we do not stay in the valleys forever.

I have kept my promise, and I do not tell young moms to enjoy every moment. I would tell a young mom to embrace each season but that it is impossible to enjoy every moment because some moments are terrible, and the only good thing about them is that they are momentary and do not last forever. She needs to move through them and move forward. She needs to go to sleep, wake up tomorrow and realize it's a new day, and even if she cannot see it right now, she is doing an amazing job.

I would tell her that her chatty toddler will grow up to be a chatty teenager, and she will be glad her daughter still talks to her. I would tell her that her frustrated preschooler, the one who is crying because she can't figure out how to make an airplane out of paper plates and scotch tape, will someday teach herself how to play the ukulele and knit with pencils by watching YouTube videos. And I would tell her that one day in the not-so-distant future, a teacher will say that her super-intense, over-the-top daughter—the one who told the neighbors their couch was ugly when she was in preschool—has been chosen to help a student with special needs because of her caring, kind

nature.

As moms, we are given many, many moments. Some of them are more beautiful than we ever could have imagined. Some of them surprise us and catch us off guard, making us laugh until we cry, or cry until our eyes swell. And some of them are harder than we ever thought possible and bring us to our knees. They stretch us and press us and shake things out of us that we never knew were there.

It's okay to not love every minute. That's a whole lot of pressure. It is an impossible endeavor that often leaves us feeling frustrated and riddled with guilt. What if, instead, we set our hearts on pilgrimage and take each moment for what it is? What if we choose to embrace both joy and sorrow, ease and challenge, calm and chaos? What if we allow ourselves to become students again and permit our moments to be our teachers, trusting that God has drawn up the lesson plans in wisdom and love? This is how mothers become pioneers and pilgrims.

## Life Boxes

My mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get. —Forrest Gump

Almost immediately after dropping off our eldest daughter, Kate, at college for her freshman year, I received an advertisement from a company that sends care packages to college students. Their products are presented in such a way that vulnerable parents, particularly mothers whose hearts have just been ripped out of their chests after sending their children hundreds of miles away from home, feel compelled to purchase one of their special packages. These care packages are designed with your child in mind (even though the “designers” have never met your child) and will be sent at precisely the right moment for when he or she is missing home, cramming for midterms, or completely stressed over final exams. You can write a personalized note to be included in the box, but the rest is all taken care of by complete strangers who do not have any idea whether your child prefers Cheetos or Fritos, Oreos or Fig Newtons, granola bars or mixed nuts. The price tag is quite hefty considering what it would cost to send your own package with your child's actual favorite snacks and reminders of home. I opted out and decided to put my own assortment together to send to Kate a few weeks after school started.

I began to make a list and gather some of her favorite things: Swiss Cake Rolls, Burt's Bees lip balm, English breakfast tea, York Peppermint Patties, and cozy socks. As I rummaged through kitchen cabinets and drawers looking for items to include, I came across some random junk which I decided to throw in the box as well: expired coupons, obsolete cell phone chargers, and useless objects from the junk drawer. Then, I began looking for more useless, weird things, just for fun. I went through the cabinets in the laundry room, finding all sorts of clutter and objects I knew would make Kate laugh. I cleaned the dryer filter and put the lint in a Ziploc bag. I crossed out the words “glue stick” on a fresh tube of glue and wrote “grape-flavored ChapStick” with a Sharpie. I threw in a couple stray socks and a few dead batteries for good measure, included a heartfelt note, taped the box closed and shipped it to my daughter.

She opened her special care package from us over FaceTime, and its contents made Kate and her friends laugh. Then she read the note which explained that life is a mix of both good and bad. You get some really great stuff in your life, but you also get some garbage. You will enjoy many moments

in your life, but you will not enjoy them all. And a sense of humor can take you a long way.

I am a big fan of traditional wedding vows. Not everyone uses them; many couples opt to write their own vows and sometimes they do not resemble the traditional vows at all. Bernie and I wrote our own vows for our wedding, and at the time I think I was going for something softer and not as tragic sounding as “worse, poorer, sickness, and death.” We pledged to support and encourage one another, to be faithful and love each other, but we did not use language that depicted the worst-case scenarios we might have to face as a couple. Now, twenty-five years later, I wish we had. Those vows would not have actually changed anything that happened, of course, but had I reflected on and absorbed the potential hardships depicted in those words and phrases, however harsh they may be, they may have prepared me a bit more for what was to come. They may have set me up to expect some incredibly hard moments mixed in with the blissful ones, instead of naively thinking we were somehow special and would escape the difficulties I had seen others face. Though it would not have lessened our grief, it might have taken away some of the shock of losing our first baby three months into my pregnancy. It might have softened the blow when a neurologist told Bernie a few years into our marriage that he had multiple sclerosis. And it might have enabled us to normalize our marital struggles instead of thinking something strange and unusual was happening to us.

What if we took vows when we became mothers? Oh, I know we wouldn't want to spoil the magic of new motherhood, with its soft blues and pinks, its nursery rhymes and lullabies. We would not want to taint our perfectly decorated nurseries with words describing the inevitable challenges of parenting. But maybe, if we had a realistic view of this motherhood journey going into it, we wouldn't beat ourselves up because we are finding some aspects of it to be harder than we ever imagined. Maybe we would not feel like we need to hide our depression or anxiety or anger over how things are not the way we thought they would be. Maybe we could lock eyes with another mom and know that we could be honest, because maybe—just maybe—she is struggling, too. If mommy vows were a thing, I think mine would read something like this:

Dear Child of mine,

I promise to love you with all my heart, no matter what. When you cuddle and coo and sleep peacefully in my arms, and when you cry all night and keep me from sleeping, I love you. When I feed you and bathe you, change you and tickle you, and when I cannot figure out for the life of me how to calm you down and make you feel better, I love you. When I am overwhelmed with both the joys and demands of caring for a totally dependent human, even in my sleep-deprived, exhausted state, I love you. When you learn to say “Mama” and say it a million times, and when you learn to say “no” and disobey me, I love you. When you figure out the keys to my heart and how to push all of my buttons, I love you. When I am funny and amaze you, when I fail and lose my temper, when I say the most beautiful words to you and then say words that should never be said, I still love you.

I will teach you wonderful things and also some not-so-wonderful things you will one day have to work very hard to unlearn. Know this: I love you. We will have such fun together and enjoy some of the very best moments this side of heaven. And there will be some really hard moments as well. We will be best buds and we will hurt one another. We will fight and struggle and need to forgive. Over and over and over again. The challenges of motherhood will bring out the very best and the very worst in me—I love you. We will grow together, learn about our great God together, and I will love you forever. No matter what.

Always,  
Mama

# The Valley of Weeping

As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs. . . .  
—Psalm 84:6

Grown-ups are big into time travel. My friend, Denise, has four adult sons and she says if she could go back to the days when her boys were little, to the days of trick-or-treating and Santa Claus, she would do it in a heartbeat. My sister, Kari, is a baby person, and if she could travel back in time you would find her cuddling her babies in her rocking chair. She misses those days. I do not. I mean, I loved my babies, but I also love to sleep. If I could turn back time, I would go back to when my daughters were three or four years old. At this age, their personalities were really beginning to shine, and I absolutely loved their curiosity, the questions they asked, the adorable things they said, and how they seemed to hang on every word I said. (I know, I may not be remembering all of this exactly right, but that is part of the fun of reminiscing.) My youngest daughter, Brenna, used to say “pail nolish,” and I immediately intercepted any attempt made by other people to correct her. I wanted her to say it that way forever, or at least until she could figure it out herself.

If we had magic remote controls, most of us would rewind and go back to some of these moments. We would hit “pause” from time to time, freezing the frame on certain moments that are so very special we don’t want them to end. And if we are honest, there are times we would use our magic remote to fast-forward, skip over, and speed through moments and seasons that are difficult and wrought with pain.

Each of us will inevitably pass through what the Psalmist calls the “Valley of Baka” (weeping). It may be a medical or financial crisis, a period of marital distress, a betrayal, trauma, or loss. It may be a season of parenting that is especially difficult, a relational conflict, or a battle with depression or anxiety. It may be a season of loneliness or doubt—whatever it is, we wish more than anything we could just get past it as quickly as possible.

And yet the psalmist writes that “as they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools” (Psalm 84:5). Clearly, we do not relish this part of the pilgrimage. We do not enjoy our moments in the valleys. Most of us resist the process—this painful part of the journey between where we are now and where we want to be, between who we are now and who we will become. We would like to rush through it, but the valley terrain is difficult to traverse. It requires us to go slow. Yet it is in these moments, maybe more than any other, where we experience God’s nearness. He never leaves us alone. He walks with us in our pain. He speaks things to us in the valley that we cannot hear anywhere else. His comfort and peace transform our valleys of weeping into places of springs.

I passed through one of my darkest valleys several years ago when I found out my mom had terminal cancer. Before I ever became a mother, I was a daughter. I was her daughter. And the thought of losing my mom was unbearable. There is a desperation that comes when you realize there is nothing you or any other human on the planet can do to change your situation. And though you know God can change it, and you believe he has the power to intervene and alter the outcome, the reality is that sometimes he does not. Sometimes he chooses to walk you through the Valley of Weeping, hold you in the darkness, and show you that he is everything you will ever need.

I wanted to fast-forward through the pain and the sorrow. I did not want to watch my mom suffer. I did not want to watch her die. I told my closest friends, “If I could skip over all of it I would. I’d go straight to the funeral. And then I would probably want to skip the funeral too, because the whole

wretched ordeal seems intolerable.”

And yet, as I leaned into the hard moments and made my way through the rocky, uneven places, one foot in front of the other, my valley became a place of springs. Time with my mom was a gift. Friends came alongside, supported me, cared for me, and walked with me. God’s presence brought healing and comfort. He filled me with unexpected joy and an abundance of peace. His love enveloped and held me together, and in him, I found everything I needed.

It’s a good thing we do not have a magic remote control. Because often it can be so hard for us to see the value, the beauty, and the opportunities for growth in the less-than-perfect moments. If it were up to us, we might choose only those moments that are shiny and pretty at first glance, ordering up exactly what seems good to us, and then replaying them over and over again. We might be tempted to skip over those moments that loom dark in the distance and threaten to bring pain, struggle, anxiety, or sadness into our lives. But God is in all of it: the good and the bad, the joy and the sorrow, the beauty and the pain. He is good. He brings joy. He creates beauty.

If we want to live authentic lives in the real world, with our real families and our real problems, enjoying every minute is not an attainable goal. Let’s instead resolve to be present, not longing for the past or anxiously thinking about the days to come. Let’s enjoy and savor and soak up every second of the beautiful moments because they are a gift, and let’s persevere and grow through the hard ones. Let’s put our trust in the Giver of moments who walks with us, loves us with an everlasting love, and is able to transform our valleys into places of springs.

See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

(Isaiah 43:19)

### Review:

When our hearts are “set on pilgrimage,” it changes the way we view parenting. Rather than being short-sighted, we hold the long view. We develop patience and endurance as we “zoom the lens out,” remembering that motherhood is a long walk. We find our strength in God as we walk one step at a time. And we adjust our expectations to include both hills and valleys, smooth and rocky terrain, seasons of joy, and seasons of weeping. We will not enjoy every moment of this journey, but we can find joy along the way.

### Reflect:

1. How does “setting your heart on pilgrimage” shift the way you view your parenting journey? In which of these areas do you need God to expand your perspective: holding the long view (zooming the lens out), walking each step in his strength, or adjusting your expectations?
2. In the Introduction, Becky talked about how some of the platitudes we offer one another can produce guilt-laced, negative self-talk. What does your internal self-talk sound like? (Examples may include: I should be enjoying my kids more. This shouldn’t be so hard. I should be a better mom. . . .)
3. When have you wished you could fast-forward through a valley? Have you experienced God’s presence in places of pain?

### Respond:

Father, you are full of compassion, I commit and commend myself unto you, in whom I am, and live, and know.

Be the goal of my pilgrimage, and my Rest by the way.  
Let my soul take refuge from the crowding turmoil of worldly thoughts  
beneath the shadow of your wings;  
let my heart, this sea of restless waves, find peace in you, O God.  
Amen.  
--St. Augustine