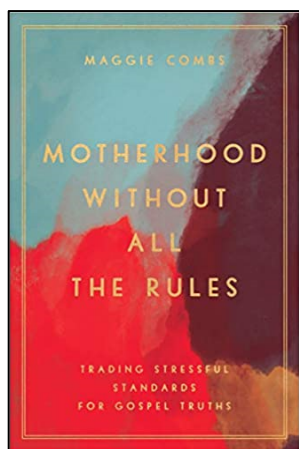


Motherhood Without All the Rules: Trading Stressful Standards for Gospel Truths

Author Reminds that the Pursuit of Christ and Holiness Offers Freedom
from the Pressures of Motherhood



St. Paul, MN: The journey of motherhood can be extremely rewarding and sometimes incredibly challenging. In her quest to raise a happy and godly family, a mom can often feel inadequate, frustrated and overwhelmed by the “rules” or expectations placed upon her.

Moms usually feel responsible for the happiness and physical and emotional welfare of her “mom kingdom,” without neglecting her own self-care. As it’s been said, “*If mom isn’t happy, than no one is.*”

Maggie Combs is a mom of three sons and understands the sacrifice, commitment and effort it takes to create a holy and loving home. She affirms that if moms want to find freedom from the stressful expectations of motherhood, they must prioritize a close relationship with God.

In her book *Motherhood Without All the Rules: Trading Stressful Standards for Gospel Truths* (Moody Publishers, Sept. 2020), Combs explores the “rules” of motherhood and counteracts them with the gospel truths. She shares personal reflections and godly insight that shifts the priority of being a *good* mom to a *Christ-centered* mom.

Each chapter discusses a stressful rule that distorts a mom’s thinking, then offers a biblical perspective on God’s love, grace, and fellowship. Through commitment and practice, these truths will assist moms as they grow in holiness through a better understanding of Scripture and the Trinity. Some of the rules discussed include:

- **Stressful Standard: Everything Depends on You.**
Gospel Truth: God is the Best Parent.
This rule sets you up as an overly cautious mom who protects her kids from the consequences of their own actions. When you let God be the best parent, you don’t stand in God’s place in their lives. Psalm 103
- **Stressful Standard: Be More Than Just a Mom.**
Gospel Truth: Find Your Life By Losing It.
Motherhood offers a painful breaking down of your self-focused world. It strips you of the ability to have the perfect life by your own power. The world says you will discover happiness by putting either your children or yourself at the center of your world. God offers His Son to be the firm foundation for your happiness. 1 John 3
- **Stressful Standard: You’re Not Supposed to be Your Kid’s Friend.**
Gospel Truth: Your Children are Your Nearest Neighbors.
Setting and enforcing boundaries can result in unkind attitudes toward your children that may develop into a combative, rather than loving, relationship. We can forgive our children when we experience God’s forgiveness. 1 John 3 -4

- Stressful Standard: Mom and Dad Have to be on the Same Page.**
Gospel Truth: You Can Be United in Your Motivations Despite Your Differences.
 If you try to force your husband to agree with you in every detail, you will live in opposition. When two people are seeking God’s plan, they may make different choices but can be united in the same goal. When we experience unity despite differences, we affirm that we were made for oneness. Philippians 2
- Stressful Standard: Image is Everything.**
Gospel Truth: You are Transformed from the Inside Out.
 When we aren’t living in God’s approval in Christ, we search elsewhere to confirm our value. When someone else’s life appears better than ours we become discouraged and self-demeaning. Sanctification happens when the motives and desires of your heart are centered on the awesomeness of God instead of proving your worth. Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 10:16-23

Additional topics featured in *Motherhood Without All the Rules* include proper soul-care (over self-care), joy through challenging circumstances, obedience to God’s calling in motherhood, a righteous inheritance of Jesus (not children), and living with an intentional pursuit of God’s holiness.

“My goal in writing this book is to help you grow in godliness by first helping you better understand *who* God is and *how* that impacts your motherhood,” says Combs. “Because we live as already saved and redeemed, but not yet holy, perfect, and sanctified ... choosing the gospel over the false hope will always be a fight the world offers in its system of rules for mothers.”

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About the Author:



MAGGIE COMBS is the author of *Motherhood Without All the Rules: Trading Stressful Standards for Gospel Truths*. When motherhood overwhelmed her, God drew her closer to Himself through the writing of her first book, *Unsupermommy*.

She loves playing games with her husband and three sons, herding goats on their family farm, and reading young adult literature and mysteries in her free time.

It is her joy to disciple women in her local church, through her writing, and as content director for Well-Watered Women. You may have read or heard Maggie before on The Gospel Coalition, Risen Motherhood, Revive Our Hearts, The Journeywomen Podcast, and more.

Her official web site is www.maggiecombs.com or on Instagram and Facebook as @maggie__combs

Suggested Interview Questions:

- 1) Maggie, what prompted you to write this book? In what ways does this book stand-apart from other parenting books?
- 2) What are some of the common “rules” established by our world that interfere in the life of a mom?
- 3) As a mom to three sons, you share there was a time you felt guilty for hoping to have a daughter. How did you reconcile your feelings? What is your advice to other moms of all boys who dream of having a daughter?
- 4) In chapter 3, you note that moms are told they need an escape. What are some cautions when searching for satisfaction through self-focus? What are healthy ways to pursue soul-care over self-care?
- 5) The chapter “You deserve it” notes there are opportunities for growth when we experience God’s discipline. What should our attitude be toward discipline? How do we understand His purpose for painful circumstances?
- 6) What is the root of the common mom-shaming? How can it lead to freedom and repentance?
- 7) Every mom hopes for righteous children. What do you mean that a righteous inheritance is not in children but in the Lord? How can a mom relinquish the fear that her child may reject the Lord?
- 8) What steps can moms take to persevere in the face of great challenges? (pg. 109)
- 9) Why is it important to make quiet time a priority? What if they feel limited in their time?
- 10) Do you believe that a mom’s priority should be her relationship with God then her family/marriage? What are some examples of daily “rhythms” that create intimacy with God?
- 11) What are some habits that will promote parental unity despite spousal differences? (pg. 148)
- 12) Moms will encounter disobedience (personal and perpetual) from their children. What are some reasons she may withhold forgiveness? How does a mother’s repentance to God influence her ability to forgive her children?
- 13) Despite your differences, parents can discover unity in their purpose. What are some actions from a wife that God can use to soften a husband’s heart? What are some habits that help promote unity between two different people?
- 14) Social media can result in comparison to other moms and emotional letdowns and do not satisfy a longing for community and acceptance. What can moms do to practice sanctification?
- 15) Where can readers find out more info from you? (social media handles)

Notable Quotes from *Motherhood without All the Rules*:

I had begun to adopt society's system of standards to live out godly motherhood instead of doing the hard and holy work of walking with God. I couldn't *exhibit* the fruit of the Spirit in relating to my children without being *in* the Spirit. I can't demonstrate the gospel to my children when I am not living in it myself. Jesus did not die so we could try to live up to the ideals of the world using their rules for moms. Jesus died that we might discover freedom in walking by the Spirit. Gal. 5:1 (pg. 15-16)

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. (pg. 21)

God created us to work for His kingdom, not to build our own. We'd rather rule as sovereign in our little kingdom as 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. (pg. 22)

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. (pg. 29)

Even at its very best, the love of a mom for a child is a shadow of the perfect love of God. His love defies all human logic. It is completely sacrificial (Rom. 8:32). It meets all your needs—even the ones you cannot identify (Phil. 4:19). It shelters you during life's hardest seasons and only allows those seasons when they are for your good (Rom. 8:28). It satisfies your deepest longings for comfort and happiness (Ps. 145:16–19). God's love is perfectly parental. (pg. 38)

If you hold too tightly to the circumstances of your kids' lives, they will miss out on the opportunity to become independent. You are trying to protect them, but God is trying to sanctify them. Trust His sovereignty over their unpleasant circumstances and fight the urge to step in when they can learn to navigate those challenges on their own. When they are under pain or pressure, have faith that the Holy Spirit will step in to reveal God to them. Because God is the best parent, your watchful, frantic, and burdened mom heart can find rest and freedom in pointing your children to His love and care. (pg. 41)

As the perfect parent, God knows so much more than we do about discipline. He perfectly understands the necessity of boundaries, truth, and withholding good things for better ones. Because He loves us, He allows discomfort for the goal of growth. He is not afraid to make hard decisions so we might mature in holiness. In God's kingdom, we don't deserve comfort and ease, and *He is actually too kind to give them to us*. When we are comfortable and capable, we rarely grow. In our discomfort, we discover the joy of completing a marathon of sacrifice and discipline instead of a vacation in the muck of our heart's earthly desires. (pg. 61)

There isn't a mom in this world who doesn't know she's messed some stuff up, but the world's solution is to shrug shame off by embracing our personalities: *you just do you!* We're told that our failures aren't really our fault, they're just who we are. Unfortunately, this doesn't diminish shame, but cements it. The inner voice continues to taunt. The scariest thing about inner mom-shaming? Mistaking our internal condemnation for God's voice. Shame builds a wall between us and God. (pg. 72)

If you want to be holy, pursue godliness, but I discovered that it meant having reverence or respect for God; it's the New Testament equivalent of fearing the Lord. When you have proper reverence for the greatness of God, His grace, and the gospel, you willingly lay down your small, inconsequential kingdoms to serve in the eternal, unparalleled kingdom of God. As you serve and worship your rightful King by daily laying down your life, you will finally experience the happiness you have been searching for. (pg. 99)

What is particularly problematic about living for the kingdom of mom is that it gets the purpose of motherhood all wrong. God made you a mom not because He knew you would be awesome at it, but because motherhood is one of the ways God uses to teach you your need of Him and grow you in knowledge of Him. This purpose for motherhood transforms your motives from serving and glorifying yourself to knowing God through the good work He has given you to do. Godly motherhood is the fruit of God's work within you. Instead of starting with who you want to be and what you want to do, begin with who Christ is and the work He has already done. (pg. 120)

When we find ourselves on a different page from our husbands, we can still empathize with them because we have experienced compassion and love from a Savior who *entered into* our experiences. Imagine how their family would benefit as they lay down their own needs to meet the needs of the family, speak truth with grace as they discipline their children, offer forgiveness for failures, and work toward restoration of relationship and nearness to each other and their kids and Christ. (pg. 144)

As we work to portray our best selves to the world, we pass along this standard to our children. They have to wear certain clothes, smile the right way, and pause mid-play as we find the perfect angle for the shot. Even in our most innocuous social media posts we are setting an example that appearances and the approval of others matter. Does that mean we never post pictures of our children online? Some may choose to go that route, but all of us should at least pause to consider what our interaction with social media might be teaching our children. (pg. 153)

Whether your day is filled with the monumental or mundane, it is meant to prune away your self-centered kingdom motives until what remains is a pure heart that finds its joy in serving and knowing God. Just as your kids will notice when you are using social media to create a perfect image, they will also learn from your example as you grow in godliness through relationship with God Himself. (pg. 160)

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS:

CHAPTER 1

Building a Kingdom of Mom

CHAPTER 2

Stressful Standard: *Everything depends on you.*

Gospel Truth: *God is the best parent.*

CHAPTER 3

Stressful Standard: *You need an escape.*

Gospel Truth: *God supplies exactly what you need.*

CHAPTER 4

Stressful Standard: *You deserve it.*

Gospel Truth: *Your loving God disciplines you.*

CHAPTER 5

Stressful Standard: *You do you.*

Gospel Truth: *Discover freedom through repentance.*

CHAPTER 6

Stressful Standard: *You're a good mom.*

Gospel Truth: *Become more like Christ.*

CHAPTER 7

Stressful Standard: *Be more than just a mom.*

Gospel Truth: *Find your life by losing it.*

CHAPTER 8

Stressful Standard: *This is your only chance.*

Gospel Truth: *God's grace can redeem your insufficiency and quiet your fear.*

CHAPTER 9

Stressful Standard: *You don't have time for quiet time.*

Gospel Truth: *Intimacy with God is essential.*

CHAPTER 10

Stressful Standard: *You're not supposed to be your kid's friend.*

Gospel Truth: *Your children are your nearest neighbors.*

CHAPTER 11

Stressful Standard: *Mom and Dad have to be on the same page.*

Gospel Truth: *You can be united in your motivations despite your differences.*

CHAPTER 12

Stressful Standard: *Image is everything.*

Gospel Truth: *You are transformed from the inside out.*